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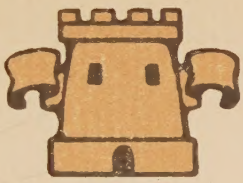

The Foreign Classical Romances

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WITH INTRODUCTORY ESSAYS BY

HAMILTON WRIGHT MABIE, L.H.D., LL.D.
Co-Editor N. Y. Outlook.
Author of "Norse Stories," "Essays on Books and Culture," etc.

PROF. MAURICE FRANCIS EGAN, A.M., LL.D.
Catholic University of America.
Author of "Studies in Literature," "Modern Novelists," etc.

PROF. LEO WIENER
Harvard University. Translator of Tolstoy's Complete Works.
Author of "Anthology of Russian Literature," etc.

BARON GUSTAVO TOSTI
Doctor of Laws, Naples University. Royal Consul of Italy at Boston.

WOLF VON SCHIERBRAND
Former Berlin Correspondent N. Y. Evening Post. Author of "Germany," etc.

A. SCHADE VAN WESTRUM
Licentiate Amsterdam University. Literary Editor N. Y. Mail and Express.

GENERAL EDITOR: LIONEL STRACHEY
Compiler of "Little Masterpieces of Fiction."
Translator of Stories by Balzac, Sudermann, Serao, etc.

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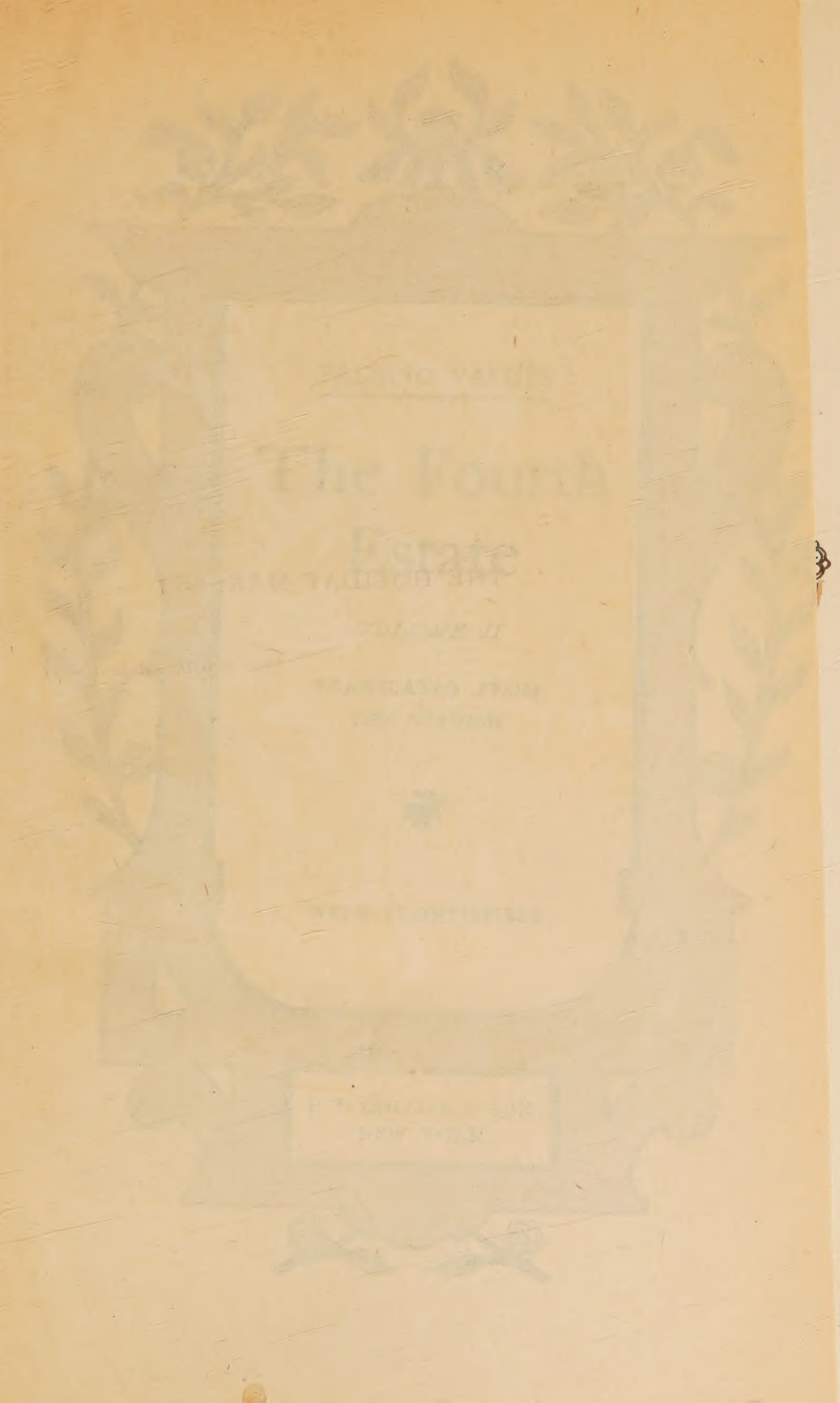

THE HOLIDAY MAKERS

The Fourth Estate Vol. II

PALACIO VALDÉS

The Fourth Estate

VOLUME II

TRANSLATED FROM
THE SPANISH

WITH FRONTISPIECE

P. F. COLLIER & SON
NEW YORK

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The Fourth Estate

THE FOURTH ESTATE

VOLUME TWO

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THE FOURTH ESTATE

CHAPTER XVII

PABLITO DISPORTS HIMSELF

"It would be as well to put a light curb on her."

"Oh! a bit," returned Piscis gravely.

Both were silent for some minutes, then Pablito exclaimed:

"Confounded mare! I never in my life saw such a sensitive mouth."

"Like silk," returned his friend in a tone of profound conviction.

Another pause.

"Think we ought to give her more of the spur?"

"The spur is never amiss with any animal," growled Piscis in the same decided tone.

"We must train her in trotting."

"It would be just as well."

During these remarks the two inseparable equestrians walked right across the town from the other end, where they had been in conclave in Don Rosendo's stables. It was ten o'clock at night; the air soft and springlike. The few people about were hastening homeward, and the only shops

now open were those of popular resort, such as Graell's, Marano's, and the like. In the Cabin there was a great deal of light and excitement. Pablito, who shared his father's resentment in the matter, said to his friend, as they passed the abhorred club:

"Piscis, throw a stone at the door and break the glass."

Thereupon Piscis, always aggressive, took up a flint from the road, waited for his friend to get round the corner, and then, zas! he flung it at the Cabin and shivered the windows to atoms. Then he took to his legs, and for fear of being recognized by those who came out in search of him, he ran away on all fours with wondrous agility.

There were also some people in the Café de la Marina. They entered the place and quaffed in silence several glasses of chartreuse without its interfering with the active working of their brains.

On rising Pablito said:

"The best thing will be to put her in harness with Romeo."

"That is just what I was thinking," returned Piscis eagerly.

After leaving the café Pablito was asked, not in words, but with a horrible face, whither they were going.

"There."

"Good; then as I pass by my home I will make myself look a bit shabbier."

They left the principal streets, not without Piscis stopping a minute at his abode to alter his attire, and then they proceeded to the other end of the town, where the working classes mostly lived. They stopped in a certain street, as dull as it was dirty, in front of a poor-looking house with a rough stone balcony. Pablito looked carefully all round, and then gave a long, low whistle with the skill which distinguished him in this acquirement. Then casting an anxious look at the oil-lamp burning fifty steps off, he said:

"If we could but put out this light."

The terrible Piscis was again to the fore. He stepped to the corner of the wall, and there extinguished the light with his stick, of course breaking the glass at the same time.

A woman's form then appeared upon the balcony. Pablito jumped up to the iron grating of the window, and thence climbed noiselessly on to the balcony. Piscis meanwhile kept guard at the corner, armed with his formidable stick. Who was the woman who happened just then to be the object of the attentions of the Sultan of Sarrio? "The fair Nieves," those will reply who have followed the course of this story. Well, although we do not wish to run counter to the perspicacity of our readers, truth obliges us to declare that the

young woman was not the fair Nieves, but the fair Valentina.

What! that prim needlewoman so averse to young gentlemen, and who, moreover, was betrothed to a young man named Cosme?

The same in body and soul, with her golden curls upon her forehead, her piquant frown, and her nose a little turned up. Pablito was the man to cause this sort of upset. While he was courting, or pretending to court Nieves, he was trying the ground with Valentina. But she was more obdurate than the other. The first kiss that he gave her upon the neck was when she was drinking some water in the kitchen. The angry embroideress called it disgraceful; she turned as red as a cherry, her expressive eyes shone with rage, and she cried:

"Take care, for I won't stand such ways! Get along, and try them on with those that like them."

By this she doubtless meant Nieves. Pablito proceeded more cautiously henceforth, but not with less audacity. He did not seem to object to her brusk manners; he joked with her, and he patiently bore with her spitfire ways, for Valentina was a type of the artisan in Sarrio whose want of culture seemed merely an additional charm. The trousseau of Ventura being finished, there were no more opportunities of meeting, so Pablito made use of the public balls to lay siege to her.

Not that he had abandoned Nieves. The gay

young fellow guessed that the self-love excited by rivalry would do more in his favor than even the personal charms with which he was endowed. This perspicacity was innate in him, and had been clearly shown from the first time he paid attention to any of the fair sex, which is an additional argument for those who believe in the preexistençe of the human being; because it could only be by having laid siege to several seamstresses in a previous state of existence that our young friend could have such clear ideas as to the course of action that would prove successful.

At last the conquest was made.

She began by giving up her young man, and she ended by making evening appointments like the present one with the gallant Pablito.

"Is your father asleep?" was the first question that he asked when he appeared on the balcony.

"What is that to you?" returned the severe seamstress.

"Well, if he is not asleep, you see, by jingo! the thing is serious."

"Hold your tongue, coward, or I will make it hot for you; I will make a disturbance for the pleasure of seeing you run."

Here Pablito caught her in his arms and kissed her effusively. The young girl smiled with delight, but she soon frowned, and her whole physiognomy expressed great displeasure.

"Go away, go away!" she said, pushing him off. "I have something to ask you. Where were you this morning?"

"This morning? In several places—at home, at the Club, in the stables, at the end of the landing-stage."

"Were you not in the Calle de San Florencio?"

"Yes, I passed by there two or three times."

"And whom did you meet there?"

"How should I know. Several people."

"Didn't you meet Nieves?" asked the pretty seamstress with suppressed rage.

"Why, yes, I did meet her," he returned in a careless tone.

"And you did not stop her?"

"No, I simply said good-day."

"Fool! hypocrite! prevaricator!" Valentina exclaimed with fury. "Take that, you ass!" giving him a terrible pinch on his arm. "You only said 'Good-day' to her, and yet you were a whole hour with her! Take that, you deceiver! Take that!"

Upon this she gave him so many pinches that the wretched Pablo was doubled up with pain, while powerless to utter a sound out of respect for the slumbers of the father of the vixenish girl.

"Stop, Valentina! for goodness' sake. You are indeed mistaken. I stopped a minute to ask her if she had finished hemming my handkerchief."

"It was no such thing! You stood there for

a good hour together, laughing like mad! I felt inclined to strangle you with my own hands, you fool! you fool! you more than fool!"

The enraged girl, now maddened with fury, laid her hands on the neck of her adorer, as if about to strangle him.

Her heart, however, was touched at seeing such a handsome, fine young fellow with his eyes distended with terror; in fact, Valentina took pity on him and let him go, but not without giving his arms several additional pinches.

"You don't deceive me, you know; you don't deceive me! If I find that you are with her again I won't have anything more to do with you."

"All right, I promise not to speak to her any more; but don't go and believe the first story you hear about me."

"Will you promise?" asked the obdurate seamstress, looking at him in a relentless way.

"Never fear."

"Well, you will have to settle with me if you don't keep your word. Come."

This was the calm and tender mode of Valentina's dealings with the young swell of Sarrio; and when he gave Piscis, or any other friend, an account of them, he smiled like a man of the world, and declared that these irascible, imperious women are most attractive to men, especially if, like himself, they were somewhat bored.

After they had made peace, or, to speak more correctly, after Valentina had come to terms, there was a whispered conversation which lasted for some time. Then nothing more was heard, and one was led to suppose that the balcony was vacated. If it were not very ugly to cast a slur on a girl's reputation, one might have suspected that the loving couple had retired to the interior of the house.

Piscis meanwhile kept guard, walking up and down the street; and the fact was, he was not the only one so occupied, for a man had posted himself ever since their arrival in the corner of a doorway, where the shadows were darkest. Motionless and protected by the gloom, he was invisible to Piscis. Profiting by a moment when the back of the latter was turned to the house, the man issued from his hiding-place, and cautiously approached it. He looked at the balcony and hesitated a few seconds. This hesitation caused his failure. By the time he jumped up to catch hold of the bars the terrible Piscis turned and saw him.

With two strides he was under the balcony before the intruder could swing himself up to it, and his famous stick came down with such force on the shoulders of the poor man that he loosened his hold on the bars and measured his length with the street. The wrathful Centaur was about to repeat the blow, when the fellow jumped up with such

agility and fled away so swiftly that the second blow struck the ground, and he did not attempt a third.

"Confound it!" cried Piscis.

This exclamation must have reached the ears of his happy friend, for a few seconds later he appeared on the balcony and swung himself into the street.

"What is it?" he asked, approaching his friend.

"A man."

"Where?" asked the cavalier, turning round two or three times.

"He has escaped now. I caught him just as he was about to scale the balcony, and I knocked him down with my stick. Then he took to his heels. By Jove! Romeo couldn't have beaten him in speed."

"This man," returned Pablito gloomily, "must be an old lover of Valentina's. What is to be done?"

"Then, if he be a lover, I don't know what he could be here for, unless it was to give you a licking."

Pablito threw his arm round his friend's shoulder, not to support himself, although his legs trembled somewhat, but to say, in a low voice:

"Do you think so?"

"One—or two, or three."

The handsome young man was silent. At the end of a minute he said:

"Do you know him?"

"I? No; and you?"

"I have never seen him; I only know that he is named Cosme, and that he is a barber."

They left the street in silence, and in silence they arrived at Belinchon's house. There, on taking leave of each other, Pablito said to his friend:

"If I go there again, which I doubt, will you do me the kindness not to lose sight of the balcony, eh?"

"I should rather think so," was the laconic reply of the indomitable Piscis.

The following day was Sunday, and the usual weekly ball took place at the school. They danced in the afternoon from three to seven. The room was spacious, having been built a few years before as a school for children. The benches were piled up on the teacher's platform; the walls were covered with maps and proverbs, and as the followers of Terpsichore danced the languid *habanera*, they could amuse themselves by reading a portion of the invaluable exhortations tending to show that virtue and labor are the true treasures of childhood: "The studious child will receive the reward of his industry;" "Truth and perseverance are superior to talents." And there at the end over the master's table was the image of Christ crucified

(oh, blasphemy!), mounted on a silken background, in the presence of these wild polkas and voluptuous dances.

It was there that, without fear of rain or sun, strangers could court and admire the young girls of Sarrio. And, in truth, all the captains and pilots who visited the town took care to frequent the place. Occasionally their admiration led them to overstep the bounds of British gravity, and their fair beards came too near to the face of some beauty.

"Are you mad, Christian?" she would ask, as she pushed him away.

"Christian! Christian!" the Englishman repeated in astonishment. "What is being a Christian?"

"Goodness, man, don't you know the doctrine? Well, learn it then."

It would be about five or six in the evening, after four or five waltzes and as many polkas had been danced, that these ladies were so charming. The well-circulated blood tinged their cheeks with a bright color; their fair or dark locks, in pretty disorder, floated in the air or fell in adorable curls upon their shoulders; their eyes shone like stars in those heavenly faces, and those ruddy, luscious, half-opened lips revealed immaculate rows of teeth.

But enough, or we shall never finish; albeit in

our admiration of the working-girls of Sarrio we are outdone by every Englishman who comes hither.

There was always a sameness in the feminine element of these balls, for it was entirely composed of young girls of the same rung of the social ladder. But there was a dangerous variety in the masculine element, for it consisted of the young gentlemen as well as the young artisans of Sarrio. Thus the artisans considered that their rights were encroached upon by the rival charms of the young gentlemen, and the repeated unequal marriages that took place in the town showed how they had been ousted.

As already remarked, the West Indians were generally satisfied with the somewhat poor and faded young ladies of the place, but the young men were more taken with the charms of the working-girls. Thus the poor artisans and sailors were outdone by the gentry. What were they to do?

They found some consolation in visits to the taverns, and in the use of their sticks, which made every ball the scene of a shower of blows, and two or three gentlemen generally left the school with broken heads on a Sunday.

Pablito had come off pretty well hitherto, thanks to his most faithful Piscis, who undertook to receive the blows intended for him. The only

inconvenience he suffered at most of these gatherings was the loss of his hat, and this happened so repeatedly that he was quite certain that they picked a quarrel with him to make him lose it. When an artisan wanted a hat he knew how to get one.

But Piscis could not save him from the blows he received that Sunday; and this not from want of will on the part of the Centaur, but because there are things that really can not be done. With what care did that gallant youth twist the ends of his mustache before his looking-glass! How he dressed his cheeks with a cream he had sent for from Madrid, and what havoc was made of his toilet an hour afterward!

He walked across the room, looking so handsome and so attractive that it was a pleasure to see him as he cast his eyes from one side to another, as all men well versed in his accomplishments are prone to do. Occasionally on passing a young lady he would say, "Pretty as ever, Julia!" or else, "Your eyes are killing"; or, "Torquata, there's no one to come up to you in Sarrio," or any other remark flattering to a girl. But while saying these things he maintained his gravity of demeanor, as he was aware that it was one of his most irresistible charms.

He waited for Valentina for some time, but the room was full of ladies, and the brass orchestra

had played two dances without the pretty seamstress making her appearance. The strains of a mazurka began, the gilded youth encircled the slender waists of the working-girls, but Pablito, faithful to the absent, stood idle, looking on at the swift couples as they passed before him.

The mazurka over, he began to think that Valentina would not come. In the sudden way he seized an idea he was very like his father, particularly when flushed with wine, so that in a few minutes he was quite convinced of the fact. This sudden fancy happened to be coincident with the entrance into the room of the fair Nieves. Their eyes met, and the poor girl, shamefully neglected for nearly two months, smiled sweetly at him. This sweetness had been precisely the cause of her failure, for the self-sufficient Pablito soon wearied of sweet women. Nevertheless, he returned the smile, and on coming to her side he said, teasingly:

"Are you going to frighten the bulls, Nieves?"

The embroideress wore a scarlet sash at her waist, and this remark of her ex-admirer so flustered her that she could not reply. She smiled again, and said, "Ah!" "Yes," "No," and uttered a few more words that we do not remember, and looked as if she would faint with emotion. The next time he came across her he asked if she would like to dance the first polka with him. "The first, the second, the third, and all the polkas in the

world," returned Nieves, with trembling lips. Pablo was filled with remorse after having engaged himself for the polka. "What a fool, what a brute I am! And suppose Valentina comes in now!"

But she did not come. The orchestra struck up the opening bars, and the youth, without turning his eyes from the door, encircled the waist of the embroideress and dashed rapidly into the centre of the room. Other young people, no less rapid, dashed from the opposite side, and then ensued one shock, then another, and then another. Such collisions formed the chief attraction of these balls, and the young girls, instead of being angry at nearly losing their footing and having their hair tumbled, laughed with infinite pleasure. Pablo and Nieves, who could not take four turns without colliding with another couple, were perfectly charmed. Nevertheless, the young man felt his legs tremble whenever he passed the door, and he always left it as quickly as possible. When the orchestra had finished he took his partner to a corner of the room and then sat down a minute, and Pablito felt a spark of feeling glow in the ashes of his love for that girl so cheerful, so good-tempered, and so affectionate.

"Yes, I wanted to dance with you, Nieves," he said as he wiped his brow with his handkerchief.

"And I with you, Pablo."

"You?"

The girl blushed.

"Do you say you instead of thou now?"

"It is now so long ago."

"You are right. But see, I have not forgotten."

"On Wednesday I saw you—I saw you in the Nieva road—you were on a white horse."

"It was a mare."

"I thought it would throw you."

"Throw me!" exclaimed Pablito, slightly frowning. "It was a bit fresh, child; a mare does not throw me so easily."

"But it reared up so! It almost stood upright. Goodness, how frightened I was!"

"I was teaching it to step high," returned the youth, with a smile of superiority. "As she has not been worked before she resisted a bit. Sometimes her mouth seems too tender, but, taking her all round, Linda is a fine creature. Look here, when I bought her, or, rather, when I changed Negress —and she cost me over and above 1,500 reales— for her last October, she had a temper, indeed; she stuck in the middle of the road, she shied at the carts and carriages—in short, she was an impossible creature, and I said to myself: 'What is to be done with this mare?'"

Pablito, in whose heart the girl had touched a sensitive chord, talked long and brilliantly on his equestrian deeds. Nieves listened with rapturous

delight, thinking that behind the minute description of Linda's peccadillos she was going to find her lost love.

But suddenly the orator (pof!) received a blow in the middle of his face, the listener (pof!) received another, and before they had recovered from their surprise they received two more—pof! pof!

The choleric Valentina was the author of this attack, and in less than a minute she had overwhelmed them with blows.

Pablito had nothing for it but to make his escape as gracefully as he could and retire to the street. Nieves remained like an innocent dove in the clutches of a vulture, until Valentina, seeing she could go no further, as her arms were seized by some of the party, quickly tore herself free, left the room, where the next dance was about to begin, and rushed into the street.

Pablito was walking slowly, still feeling quite stunned, when he felt a terrible pain in his arm. Being quite accustomed to that kind of torture, he said, without turning his head:

"Valentina!"

"It is I! Do you think you are going to make me a laughing-stock?"

"What you have just done is very ugly," replied the youth in an angry tone, and looking his beloved in the face. "You have made a scandal, and you

have made me ridiculous. I will not tolerate that, do you hear?"

"You won't tolerate it? Well, look here, if I see you again with her I will not be contented with what I did to-day—I will strike at you both with a knife."

"But I won't allow you to do anything of the sort; neither will I have you speak to me when I am with another girl!" cried the young man, more and more infuriated.

"Not when I see you with that cat! We'll see about that, we'll see!"

Then the handsome youth, justly enraged and oblivious in his fury of all the laws of gallantry, discharged a blow at the face of his dear one, and then another, and then another, until, in fact, she had a regular buffeting. The pretty seamstress patiently submitted to this treatment of her admirer without evincing the slightest sign of resistance, nor even of avoidance of the blows. When Pablito had finished, she said, with delightful naturalness:

"Have you done now?"

"For the present, but I shall have to do it again!" roared the young man, blind with rage.

"Well, you can do it whenever you like, and I will bear it all without moving; but, beat me or not, I have told you what I shall do if I find you talking with her again. Now take me back to the ball."

"I don't want to."

"Very well; then take me somewhere else where I can put my hair straight, for you have quite disheveled it."

The youth had to obey, and so he escorted her to the Star Café, thinking on the way that he had to pay rather dearly for his conquests.

A few days later he had still greater reason to come to that conclusion. It was at the Madrileña barber's where he frequently went to be shaved and have his hair cut.

Accompanied by his chief equerry, he had entered the place and taken a seat on the sofa to await his turn.

"At your pleasure, sir," said a pale young man with a slight black mustache, looking across at him as he turned a seat round.

Pablito went forward in an absent sort of way, and dropped into the armchair with the languid grace adopted by those endowed by Providence with great superiority.

The lad covered his face with soap, and the Belinchon youth, with his proud head thrown back, waited with majestic calm for the dark hue covering his cheeks to be removed. He kept his eyes closed so as better to enjoy the vague poetic thoughts passing through his mind, for his head was always full of ideas on leaving the stable. His legs were stretched out comfortably under the

table, and his gloved hands hung lazily from the arms of the chair.

"Fernando," said the barber, who was about to shave him, to one of his companions.

"What do you want, Cosme?"

This name made Pablito tremble without knowing why; he opened his eyes, and gave a long look at the hairdresser. He did not know him, he was a new hand in the establishment; but this, instead of calming him, made him change his position several times, with a loss of his habitual ease and languor.

"Can you give me the razor that was sharpened to-day?"

"Here it is."

Fernando stretched out his hand and gave the razor to Cosme. A vague desire to rise from his seat now came into Pablito's mind, but before he could do so the barber had taken him by the nose and was proceeding to shave him.

At the end of some minutes, during which our friend, from under his long eyelashes, followed with some alarm the movements of the barber's hand, Cosme said to him, in a low voice, while his lips wreathed with a forced smile which much enlarged his mouth:

"You are Señorito Belinchon, eh?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"I have known you for some time," continued the barber, still with the same voice and smile.

"Oh, yes, for a long time. You don't know me, that's evident. Gentlemen don't take much notice of us. I often see you about here on horseback, and sometimes on foot, and I frequently notice you at the balls at the school. You dance very well, sir, very well."

"Tush!" returned Pablito, whose desire to rise was now quite overwhelming.

"Yes, very well; and, moreover, you know how to choose a partner. Caramba, sir, what pretty girls you always take, sir! Some months ago you were always dancing with a red-haired girl. She is the sister of a friend of mine. But now you are always dancing with one prettier still—Valentina. Caramba, what a good eye you have, sir! I have known this Valentina since I was a boy—we were friends at one time. Haven't you heard her talk of me—of Cosme?"

"No," murmured the youth, who was breaking out into a cold sweat.

"Well, that's strange, as we were great friends —so great that three months ago we were going to be married. But then you came along, sir, and all was over."

Cosme uttered these last words in a tremulous voice. Pablito had now great cold drops of sweat upon his brow.

Like his illustrious father, Pablo had a horror of treachery and deceit.

"Of course, what could one expect?" continued the barber, with the uncertain tone of voice divided between the desire to laugh or to weep, and at the same time he dexterously passed the razor across the throat of the gay Lothario to do away with a few encroaching hairs. "Of course a young gentleman of the upper class like you can soon oust a rough fellow like me. Girls lose their heads directly one of your sort whispers sweet nothings in their ears. They do it to amuse themselves, when it is for nothing worse. It is too well known that you have no intention of marrying Valentina. You like to spend your evenings with her on the balcony, eh? And then you'll forget her. But I truly loved the girl."

The barber's voice trembled again, and his hand also shook; but Pablito was motionless, he was petrified.

"But now," continued Cosme, "who would marry her but a madman? We poor are beneath you, and we have to bear these things. If you had been my equal we would have met on fair ground. But if I attacked you I should soon have my head broken and be put into prison. And yet," he continued after a moment's silence, in a hoarser tone, "if I now went suddenly mad, sir, farewell to horses and carriages, farewell to balls, farewell to Valentina; just by a slight stroke with this razor —pif!—and all would be over forever—"

Pablito, whose face was now as white without the soap as it had been with it, then uttered such a cry of horror and misery that Piscis, whose eyes had been suspiciously fixed upon the barber, now jumped up suddenly and caught him by the arms; Pablo sprang from his seat, and the master and all his employees cried out simultaneously:

"What is it?"

"Seize the murderer!" exclaimed Pablito, springing upon Cosme, who was as pale as death under his arrest. In one instant the gay young man, still cold with fear, told them what had happened, and poor Cosme was kicked out of the shop by the master, who did not wish to lose the best customer in the town.

CHAPTER XVIII

SECRETS OF GONZALO'S LIFE

GONZALO, recollecting that the blister had not been attended to which had been put on him the previous day, rang the bell violently. He was lying on his back in bed, gazing at the arabesques on the ceiling, the room being well lighted by two windows. He was not in his own bedroom, but in his sitting-room, where a bed was put up the first day he was taken ill. Ventura had objected to leaving their room, and as they could not both be there he had been the one to move. The illness had proved as serious as it was sudden—it was erysipelas, causing inflammation in his face, hands, and legs, which had nearly cost him his life.

It had been kept from his head by strong applications to his legs, and the doctor put blisters on various parts of his body.

"What do you want, sir?" said the maid, half opening the door.

"Be so kind as to ask my wife to come."

At the end of a minute the servant reappeared, and said:

"She is coming directly."

The young man waited, and in ten minutes' time the fair head of his wife appeared at the door.

"What do you want, my love?" she asked without coming in, and in a tone too careless to accord with the tenderness of the words.

"Come in. It is eleven o'clock, and the blister has not been attended to yet."

"I thought you would wait for the doctor to do it," she said as she hesitatingly entered the room, resplendent in a magnificent blue silk dress.

"He did not say he would come and take it off; besides, it hurts me very much."

The girl approached the bed, and after a few moments' silence she put her hand upon her husband's head and said:

"Won't it be better to wait for the doctor to do it?"

"No, no," he returned, now fairly cross; "it is hurting very much. Fetch the lint and the ointment and a pair of sharp scissors."

Ventura left the room without replying, and soon returned with the necessaries in her hand. She looked grave and seemed absent, while her face betrayed her aversion to attendance at the sick-bed.

After she had put the things on the little table by the bedside, and spread some ointment upon the lint with a knife, the young wife said softly:

"Come along."

Gonzalo raised himself in bed, and, opening his shirt, he exposed his herculean chest, on the right side of which there was the blister. The wife leaned forward to raise the linen covering, and Gonzalo profited by the occasion to kiss her forehead.

Nothing was said. The blister was large, and surrounded by a circle of inflamed flesh. Ventura straightened herself and said, with her usual want of feeling:

"Bah, bah, we had better wait for the doctor; he won't be late. If you like we will send him a message."

"I have said no," returned the young man, frowning angrily. "Take the scissors and snip the blister all round, then put the linen on the wound, and it is done. You see, it is very easy."

Ventura did not answer. She took the scissors, and, bending over him again, began to snip the blister.

"Does it hurt you?"

"It is nothing; go on."

But when the wound was disclosed to view the girl could not repress a gesture of repugnance, which did not escape her husband's sight; so that his eyes darkened and his forehead corrugated with angry lines.

"Look here, stop, stop. We will wait for the

doctor to come," he said, taking hold of her gently, but firmly, by the wrist.

Ventura looked at him in surprise.

"Why?"

"Never mind; go away, go away," he returned quickly, fastening his shirt, and drawing up the bedclothes about him.

Ventura stood with the scissors in her hand and looked at him fixedly in astonishment. Her husband lay with the frown still upon his forehead and with his eyes fixed on the ceiling.

"But why? What have I done to you, boy?"

"Nothing, nothing, only go and let me be."

The girl stood looking at him a few more minutes, and then, flying into a rage, she dashed the scissors on the floor and said in the angry, haughty tone she knew so well how to give to her words when she liked:

"I am glad of it, for the spectacle was not very pleasant, especially just before dinner."

Then, as she turned her steps toward the door, Gonzalo retorted, with a sarcastic smile:

"And I am glad to have afforded you this pleasure."

When left alone the young man's eyes flamed with fury, his lips trembled, he crumpled the sheet with twitching fingers, and he broke into a torrent of awful interjections peculiar to the brief and terrible rages of men of sanguine temperament.

Before he had completely got over his excitement he heard a soft tap at the door, and, thinking it was his wife, he called out angrily:

"Who is it?"

The person who had knocked, alarmed doubtless by the tone of his voice, waited a minute before replying. At last a soft voice said:

"It is I, Gonzalo."

"Ah, excuse me, Cecilia. Come in," he returned, suddenly mollified. His sister-in-law opened the door, came in, and carefully shut it behind her.

"I came to know how you are, and to tell you that if you want the lemonade it is ready made."

"I am better, thank you. If I keep on like this I shall be able to get up to-morrow or next day."

"Has the blister been taken off?"

"Ventura began doing it just now, but she did not finish," he replied, as a frown again darkened his brow.

"Yes, I just met her in the passage, and she told me that you were cross because you thought the task was repugnant to her," said Cecilia, smiling kindly.

"It is not that, it is not that," returned the young man in an impatient tone and somewhat shamefacedly.

"You must forgive her, for she is not accustomed

to these things. She is but a child. Besides, in her state of health she is easily upset."

"It is not that!" repeated the young man with increased impatience, and slightly raising his head from the pillows. "I should be very stupid and very selfish if I were to put myself out for something which, after all, she can not help. That is a matter of temperament, and I am accustomed to bear it in mind, especially as it is a question of my wife, and she is not well. But it is more than that, and this is the last straw that breaks the camel's back. I have now been in bed ten days and she has not entered the room more than two or three times a day, and those occasions were generally when I sent for her. Do you think that is how a husband ought to be treated by a wife? If it had not been for you and for mama—especially you—I should have been left to servants, like in a hospital."

"Oh, no, Gonzalo."

"Yes, yes, Cecilia," he returned emphatically, and raising himself up, "abandoned. My wife only appears when anybody comes to see me. Then, yes, she comes sweeping in, redolent with perfumes and glazing with colors. But as to bringing me tisanes, carrying out the doctor's orders, or keeping me company a while by reading or talking —nothing of the sort. Just now I begged her to take off the blister for me, and even as I mentioned it her whole face changed. She began by making

excuses to avoid doing it, and it was only when I insisted on it that she made up her mind to do it, but with such a bad grace and with such a cross face that I felt inclined to tear the things out of her hand. I should not have had a spark of dignity or self-respect if I had let her go on."

In his increasing excitement Gonzalo quite raised himself up in bed, and Cecilia stood in the middle of the room listening to him in dismay and distress, without knowing what to reply. She wanted to defend her sister, but she had no arguments weighty enough to contravene those of her brother-in-law.

"Gonzalo," she said at last, with a serene face and in a firm voice, "the pain you have had has somewhat excited you, and prevented your seeing things as they really are. It is possible that Ventura has been rather neglectful of her duties, but be quite assured that it was not from lack of will. I know her well, and I know that her character is not one to lend itself to the consideration and care required by an invalid. She is not fit for a sick nurse. Besides, we must recollect that her present state of health excuses her from many things."

"But if it be so in everything, Cecilia; if it be so in everything?" returned the young man, both crossly and quickly. "If she be an empty-headed girl? The only thing of any importance in the world to her is herself—her beauty, her dresses,

her jewels; all the rest—father, mother, brother, sister, and husband—all go for naught. I am certain she has been more interested in her hat from Paris than in my illness."

"Oh, don't say that, for goodness' sake! You are mad."

"I am not mad, it is the simple truth."

And in rapid, stirring tones, frequently interrupted by the intensity of his anger, he laid bare his troubles, seeming to take pleasure in reopening the wounds he had received in his matrimonial life. Ventura had a character diametrically opposed to his. It was not possible to get on with her for more than an hour, because when there was peace, and no cause for dispute, she did not rest until she had found one, doubtless for the pleasure of making up the quarrel again. If he did anything to give her any enjoyment, instead of thanking him she only acknowledged it by some joke or sarcasm. Nothing seemed of any importance to her, and his greatest sacrifices were of no account. It was impossible to make her think of anything beyond her dresses, perfumes, and ribbons. What a life she led him those three months she spent with him in Madrid! They were continually visiting drapers, jewelers, and dressmakers. The evenings were invariably spent at the play, and however much his head ached, or however tired he was, he had to appear in some box at the Royal or Prince's theatre.

The money they spent there amounted to a considerable sum. He thought he had provided himself with sufficient funds, but he had been obliged to send home three times for more. Then seeing that his income would not suffice him for this style of living, especially if he had several children, he thought of starting a brewery, and thus turn to account the study he had given the subject. But Ventura firmly set her face against such a proceeding, saying that she declined being "a brewer's wife."

He was certain that the bad state of his blood, which had brought on the sudden attack of erysipelas, was due to the life he had led at Madrid and subsequently in Sarrio. This was quite evident, for he required a life of activity and work, an outdoor life with shooting and riding; his plethoric temperament required exercise, and the sedentary life which suited Ventura, with the eternal theatre and visits, and long evenings without food, were death to him, and his blood became as thick as oil. But what did all that signify to her? All she cared about was to please herself once and for all. In Madrid she had learned to use rouge—an atrocious thing, because she was naturally as white as milk; but although he had impressed upon her several times the horror that he had of the fashion, she paid no attention to him.

While Gonzalo unburdened himself in this uninterrupted torrent of words his face successively

expressed the indignation, sadness, anger, and disappointment with which the recollection of his sufferings filled him. His great athletic form moved convulsively on the bed, sometimes raising itself and at other times throwing itself back, while his trembling, clenched hands mechanically pulled up the bedclothes which his excitement continually disarranged. Cecilia listened with her head bent and her hands clasped, hoping that his temper would calm after the disburdenment of his troubles. And so it was, for when he had thoroughly exhausted himself he drew the sheet up to his eyes, and only gave vent to a series of interminable groans mingled with a few incoherent utterances.

Then Cecilia said, in a very soft voice:

"I don't know what to say to all this, Gonzalo. It is always very dangerous to meddle with matrimonial disagreements; and if any one ought to interfere about yours it is not for me, but for mama. But I have always heard that all marriages have trials and troubles at the beginning, until the characters become molded to each other. But such troubles go by like clouds in summer; as long as the hearts are united little differences are of little consequence. And fortunately there is no fear about that in this case—you love Ventura."

"Oh, more and more every day!" he exclaimed, angry with himself. "I am in love like an ass! Yes, yes, like an ass!"

A shade of sorrow, swift as lightning, passed over Cecilia's clear eyes, but they instantly resumed their usual serene brightness.

"And she also loves you, don't doubt it. Her disposition is light, perhaps somewhat capricious, because she has always been the spoiled child of the house; she is incapable of bearing malice, but she acts without thinking, on the impulse of the moment. Besides, Gonzalo," she added, smiling, "recollect you owe her especial consideration just now, and even additional tenderness, if it be possible."

Then the girl in delicate language touched upon the future child, the bond that would indissolubly solder the union of their hearts. This child, for which the whole house was now working, would dissipate with its innocent smile the clouds that threatened to momentarily darken the love of its parents. Once it is in the world, what time will Venturita have for rouge! No; she will have enough to do to tend it, feed it, and soothe it when fretful. And the father will be so taken up with it that he will not have time to notice what dress his wife had donned, or whether she was in a good or bad humor. Cecilia's voice, soft and persuasive, albeit somewhat hesitating, which gave a peculiarly touching and humble effect to her tones, was enough to melt anybody's heart, and her brother-in-law's was not proof against it.

He suddenly calmed down, and his face expanded with a smile as he interrupted her by saying:

"Child, what a good barrister you would make!"

"It is because I am in the right," she replied, laughing.

"And if you were not, you would make yourself so. Well, well, it is over now! My tempers don't last long, and particularly when you begin to speak I am done for. No orator can come up to your way of accumulating arguments on your own side. Fancy bringing in the child!"

Cecilia could not forbear laughing.

"Confess that you missed no point."

"I don't deny it."

And both laughed merrily, joking each other affectionately, in the brotherly and sisterly way that delighted them.

At last Cecilia was about to take her departure. But before reaching the door she turned and asked, with a timidity which betrayed her strong concern on the subject:

"Would you like me to take off the blister? It must hurt you."

The young man hesitated an instant, fearful of offending his sister-in-law's delicacy.

"If you like. There is no necessity. Perhaps it will be disagreeable to you."

But Cecilia had already approached the bed and

put the lint, ointment, and scissors in order. She cut a fresh piece of lint and carefully spread the ointment upon it. Gonzalo watched her somewhat shyly. She kept silent in her heroic efforts to overcome the confusion which nearly overwhelmed her. She was indeed repenting her suggestion, and she spent some minutes passing the knife numberless times over the lint, with downcast looks, feigning engrossing attention to the task. At last, with a supreme effort she took up the lint, and, raising her eyes to her brother-in-law, she said, with assumed indifference:

"Are you ready?"

Gonzalo with a hesitating hand pushed back the bedclothes, and proceeded to unfasten his nightshirt slowly and shyly, until he had uncovered his muscular chest.

"Nice sight before dinner!" he exclaimed shamefacedly, repeating the remark expressed by his wife.

Cecilia did not reply, but proceeded to examine the wound still half covered with the blister that Ventura did not finish removing. Then she took the scissors, and with a firm hand she snipped away what remained of it.

"Do I hurt you?" she asked.

"Not at all."

When the wound was laid bare, as large as the palm of one's hand, she gently laid the lint upon

it, passed her hand several times over it to adjust it, put some linen over the lint, and without leaving off the pressure with her left hand, she took a band from the little table to keep the plaster in its place.

Then it was necessary to get the bandage round his back so as to tie it in front.

"Can't you do it?" he said, laughing nervously.

She did not reply, for she wished by her gravity to overcome the confusion to which she was a prey. She only betrayed her emotion by the slight trembling of her lips. Her eyes, half closed, shone under her long lashes with a real intense pleasure which the grave and quiet expression of her face could not conceal.

Gonzalo tried to cross the strings behind him, but it was impossible, and Cecilia came to his assistance. Her hand slightly trembled as it touched the young man's form, but she did not shrink from the performance of her task.

"A fine chest, eh?" he said with affected unconcern, to hide the embarrassment from which they were both suffering.

"It is rather," returned Cecilia.

"Don't think it is quite natural. I got these arms and chest by rowing on the Thames."

"Rowing?"

"Yes, rowing. The richest youths there don a sailor's vest or shirt, and indeed it is considered

fashionable to do so on the water. What trips we had down that river! Then every now and then there was a regatta, and the people flocked thither as they do to a bull-fight in Madrid. Fine races were held; it is a delicious amusement. What an excitement there was among us for days beforehand!"

He was quite elated at the recollection of those pleasant hours of health and strength, when neither love nor any domestic cares disturbed his merry life as a rich young athlete. Then seeing Cecilia's attention, he gave minute descriptions of little incidents in his athletic career. He told her of the races he won, those that he lost, and all the particulars relating to them. He recounted his experiences before and after the events, the kind of diet which he had to adopt to gain strength and to lose fat; he described the costume that he wore, even to the shape of the boots, and he dilated on the cries of the crowd on the banks of the river.

"There were none there stronger than you," she said, her eyes eloquent with admiration.

"Oh, yes, there were none bigger than I, but there were some stronger," he modestly replied.

The shyness of both had now vanished, and the old, pleasant sense of familiarity had reasserted itself. As he lay upon the bed, with his arms stretched out on the counterpane, he said that when he was quite himself again he would go to Tejada,

for he would have to change his mode of life to avoid another illness; he thought of going in seriously for sport, he would set up a gymnasium near the house—in short, he made up his mind to be a different man altogether. Cecilia applauded his plans, and promised to accompany him sometimes. She liked Tejada much better than Sarrio; she was born for a country life, but her brother-in-law derided these remarks.

"You don't know what it is going shooting down there. I daresay I should have to carry you in my arms as I did Ventura."

"No fear; I am stronger than I look."

When the girl at last was leaving the room Gonzalo said timidly:

"Couldn't you read to me a little?"

Cecilia had thought of the idea herself, but as the young man had complained of his wife not doing so, she thought it would put Ventura in a bad position if she offered to do so.

"What would you like me to read?"

"Anything, as long as it is not one of those horrible novels that my wife is so fond of."

"All right, I will read you 'The Christian Year.'"

"Oh, come!" he exclaimed, laughing.

So Cecilia then took from the shelf a volume of poems and began to read, seated near the foot of the bed. In a quarter of an hour Gonzalo fell into

a delicious sleep as tranquil as a child. The girl stopped reading and looked at him attentively, or rather fixed her loving eyes on him for a long time.

Then, thinking she heard steps in the passage, and not wishing to be found in that attitude, she jumped up quickly from her chair and left the room on tiptoe. When Gonzalo was convalescent he carried out his wish of going to Tejada, and all the family accompanied him with the exception of Don Rosendo. It was the month of October, and instead of the yellow foliage of other estates, Don Rosendo's place, full of firs, presented a gloomy appearance not at all pleasing to the eye. The young man carried out his program of a hygienic life. He rose early, took his gun, called his dogs, and struck across the country, returning most days with a few partridges in his bag, and as hungry as a cannibal. When his expeditions were shorter Cecilia accompanied him, according to her promise. Although on these occasions few partridges were shot, Gonzalo enjoyed the society of such a sympathetic, agreeable companion. The girl would never confess to being tired, but he always guessed it by her faltering step, and made her sit down until she was rested, when the time passed quickly in joking and talking.

But she had to struggle between her delight in these expeditions and the promises she had made her sister to work at the wardrobe for the child.

When the time had come to think about it, Ventura was about to order it from Madrid, but Cecilia said to her:

"If I have the patterns I will undertake to make the things as well as if they came from the city."

Ventura demurred a little at first, but seeing that her sister was set upon the task, she soon gave in, and Cecilia commenced the work with such enthusiasm that she hardly gave herself time to eat and sleep.

Sometimes, when her brother-in-law wanted her to go out, she would say:

"No, you must let me work to-day; I have hardly done anything the last three days."

And when he insisted and made light of her labors, she gave in, saying:

"Very well, it will be all the worse for you when you find that the child has nothing to wear when it arrives."

"Don't trouble about that, dear," he returned, laughing. "I have sufficient shirts for him and myself too, particularly if he is likely to have a predilection for low collars."

By the end of the month the open air and sun had made Cecilia very much stronger, and Gonzalo declared that she looked like a boy, a sailor boy, so sunburnt was her face.

CHAPTER XIX

VANITIES OF VENTURA

In the meanwhile Ventura led her sultana-like life, which was now more excusable. She hardly ever left the house. The minute care of her appearance took up a great deal of her time, and the rest of it was spent in the perusal of light novels. She grew more beautiful every day, and the incessant care of her person contributed not a little to increase her charms. She was like an artist in the indefatigable manner in which she touched and retouched her work in attending to her hair, her skin, her teeth, and her hands. Marriage had added to her beauty by giving an additional fulness and womanliness to her figure, and changing her springtide prettiness into a more developed loveliness. Even her state of health was no drawback to her beauty, for it only seemed to give a greater dignity to her appearance. Then the wonderful taste, or better said, art, with which she knew how to adapt the color and form of her dress to her figure brought out all the charms of her lovely person.

And so the whole house was at Ventura's feet. All the human figures on those Chinese towers were swayed by her will, as if she were some feared and adored goddess. Even Doña Paula, who had been somewhat cool to her during the first months of her married life, succumbed to the sway.

Ventura did not abuse her power as long as everything went as she wished, and she took care that it always did. So nobody but herself knew when they would return to Sarrio; the cook never arranged a meal without consulting her; the coachman came up every day to ask her at what time the carriage was wanted, and the gardener never moved a plant without her sanction. On the other hand, she did not concern herself at all about her husband's mode of amusement. Only once, when seeing him about to go out with Cecilia, she said with a smile before her sister and a few other people:

"You and Cecilia are becoming very friendly. I shall begin to be jealous."

But even as she said those words she gave the young man one of her dominating looks, which showed that she knew the strength of her power. Gonzalo could not break his chain, although he had considerably lengthened it, and he always returned to her feet quiet and submissive, like a comet that passes through space in its whirling

course, and then, when at an immeasurable distance from the sun, quietly turns itself toward it.

Gonzalo returned that look with one of absolute submission, but Cecilia turned slightly pale, and smiled to hide her confusion.

"Come, be off. I don't want to spoil your pleasure; but," she added, "if you do take advantage of me the worse for you, because revenge would be mine."

The joke was not a pretty one, considering the former relations that had existed between Cecilia and Gonzalo; but Venturita was not the woman to spare them on that account. The first days of December saw them all back in Sarrio, and a month later Ventura gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, pink and white like herself. Gonzalo was so much in love with his wife that he hailed it with pleasure, but not with that rapture and delight with which some men greet their first-born. His interest was chiefly centred in the mother, with whom everything went well. He was constantly in and out of her room, he felt her pulse and pestered Don Rufo with questions. The doctor considered that Ventura might easily nurse her child, who was strong and well formed. In consideration of the possibility of finding it exhausting, the girl had at first vaguely and then definitely expressed her objection to the course, so Gonzalo soon concurred in this decision, and, moreover, considered it quite

reasonable. Doña Paula, on the other hand, was very indignant, but she did not dare to express her disapproval to Ventura's face.

Cecilia meanwhile devoted such care and attention to the baby that she soon had entire charge of it.

She had the nurse's bed and the child's bath brought into her own room, as it was supposed to make Ventura ill to have her nights disturbed, while it did not hurt her to have her sleep broken. And, in truth, she was the first to jump up when the child cried, and take it to the nurse; and if that did not quiet it, she walked for hours up and down the room with it in her arms, until she succeeded in putting it to sleep.

So the young married couple had their nights as utterly undisturbed as hitherto. When the baby was brought to its mother in the morning, Cecilia had already bathed it in warm water and dressed it in clean clothes. Ventura played with it a little, and when the time came for her retirement into her dressing-room she gave it back to her sister.

In like manner, although with a certain timidity, due to her desire not to offend her sister, or to show the difference in their dispositions, Cecilia undertook the care of Gonzalo's clothes and the order of his sitting-room; and her brother-in-law finally constantly gave her the keys of his wardrobe, saying:

"Cecilia, I am going to dress."

Then the girl would run to his room and return in a few moments, saying: "Your things are all ready." Whereupon Gonzalo would find his clothes laid out on the bed, his shirt with the studs put in, and his boots ready cleaned by the table.

"Cecilia, the fur has come a little undone on my coat." When he put it on again it was mended. And she who cared very little about her own dress was very particular about her brother-in-law being spick and span, and she would not for anything allow him to have soiled boots or a dirty collar. She delighted in going to the window and peeping at him through the curtain as he sallied forth to the café in a fine new suit, and with a cigar in his mouth; and she stood staring after him till he turned the corner, and watched till the smoke from his cigar had vanished.

One day, feeling angry with himself at spending so much money, Gonzalo gave Cecilia the key of his cash-box, saying:

"Look here, take care of this key; neither Ventura nor I is a good manager. When we want money you can put it down in this note-book, and then let us know at the end of the month what we have spent. Perhaps we shall keep a little order like that."

Being thus provided with a steward, the married couple found their affairs improve. When

any bill came in Gonzalo said to the servant with a smile:

"Take it to the manager."

Whereupon the servant also smiled, and took it to Cecilia.

This intimacy, this close companionship in almost all the acts of daily life, engendered utter confidence between the two, particularly on Gonzalo's side. Nothing happened to him in the street or in the café but he came and told Cecilia, who was never tired of listening; his wife, on the other hand, never wanted to hear about his sport, his vexations, or his friends' affairs, for very little interested her beyond the fashions, balls, evening parties, and the marriages of the fashionables of Spain.

Her curiosity was mostly exercised in all concerning the king and queen and royal family.

She read with avidity the accounts of the gatherings at the palace; she was up in the court etiquette as much as any gentleman-in-waiting; she knew how the royal hand should be kissed; when it was necessary to speak in the presence of royalty, and how one ought to withdraw; and she was versed in the name and biography of every member of the royal family and every member of the court. The novels she read, and the conversation of the quondam lady-in-waiting of the queen who had come to take the baths in Sarrio, filled her mind with

silly ambitions, and imbued her with a strong desire to live in the brilliant atmosphere of the court.

The majesty of royalty moved and inspired her, who had ever been incapable of submission, with humility, and the brilliant life at court suggested to her all the enchantment of a pleasant dream. When she went to Madrid her position as a mere rich provincial had only admitted her to the enjoyment of the theatres, drives in the Castellana, visits to the shops, and walks in the streets; but the court with all its gaieties and delights was still as far removed as if she had remained in Sarrio. Nevertheless, she was quite certain, and not without reason, that she could have been a star in those exalted spheres; that her beauty, her vivacity, and her charming ways would have brought her into note in the most distinguished society. Sometimes, when driving in a landau with her husband, she had seen the eyes of the Duke of S— fixed upon her in flattering admiration, and she received the same notice from the Marquis of C—, and also from several eminent political people.

On one occasion she heard the Duchess of Medinaceli say to her companion as she drove past:

"Is that pretty girl just married?"

A poetic vision had remained to her of those three months in Madrid, a confused recollection of its pleasures, and a distinct desire to emulate the fashions of the smart ladies of the court with the

poor means at her disposal in the little town of Sarrio. So on her return, whenever she went out, which was very seldom, she did so in a carriage, especially if it were to the theatre. It excited some surprise and no little grumbling in the town when the carriage was first seen waiting for her at the end of the performance.

The dresses in which she appeared in public were always fantastic, and utterly different from those worn by the other ladies of the place. They generally went about their homes with their old clothes "done up somehow," as they expressed it. But Ventura created a revolution in this direction; she attired herself in the morning in new and pretty garments. She was never seen, even in the retirement of her boudoir, without being well turned out; and her silk morning-gown, her hair-nets—things hitherto unknown in Sarrio—and her velvet slippers were the admiration of the town.

Many ladies called upon her for the sole purpose of seeing her beautiful things.

When Gonzalo saw her absorbed in the perusal of society papers, and heard her describe some court ball as if she had been present, he would exclaim, laughing:

"Do you know how this mania of yours would be defined by the medical faculty? 'Grandeur mad.'"

This offended her, because, like all mocking

creatures, she was deeply wounded by ridicule leveled at herself.

The young man sometimes laughed with his sister-in-law at his wife's eccentricities, and at other times he became quite angry with her conduct, which he termed stupid and shallow; but Cecilia tried to appease him by reminding him of the youth and the impressibleness of Ventura.

"You will see," she said; "in a few months' time she will have given up all such nonsense."

Cecilia was his safety-valve, the confidante of all his matrimonial troubles, and he never failed to receive from her some useful advice or some consoling words that calmed his splenetic outbursts. He became so accustomed to these confidences that, if his sister-in-law were not at home after any difference he had with Ventura, he would put on his hat and run in search of her to the Promenade, to church, or wherever she might be.

The many hours that they spent together also favored these confidences. Ventura did not like going out, and as Don Rufo ordered the child fresh air, Cecilia undertook to accompany the nurse, and Gonzalo also joined the walks. The nurse with the baby went first, and the young man followed with Cecilia. It was during these long walks that he confided to her all his secrets, all his hopes and fears and joys. Sometimes when hearing her speak with so much perspicacity on serious mat-

ters, he exclaimed, with a want of gallantry to his wife: "What a pity Ventura has not your clever, sensible disposition!"

She, on the other hand, was as impenetrable to him as to everybody else. Whether it was because she had no secrets to tell, or whether it was due to her excessively reserved disposition, the fact remained that the eldest daughter of Belinchon carefully avoided talking of herself. Neither her joys nor her troubles were confided to anybody, and only a very sharp observer could have detected the emotions that moved her; and Gonzalo, in the simple egotism of a strong and healthy man incapable of much perspicacity, simply looked upon his sister-in-law as a passive, rational, cold being, admirable for giving advice and managing others, but incapable of feeling those rages, those joys, those insensate passions that assail weak natures like his own.

Nevertheless, he tried sometimes, in a joking way, to win her confidence. He knew that three or four young men in the town aspired to her hand, for he had come upon one or two walking up and down in front of the house, and in the theatre he had noticed them turning their opera-glasses in her direction; and although Gonzalo was somewhat disgusted at seeing that the attention was due more to the attraction of her money than to love, he tried to flatter her by alluding to her admirers.

She received the remarks in stony silence, with an absent sort of smile to conceal her thoughts, until she found herself obliged to turn the conversation.

But on one occasion Gonzalo treated the subject with more seriousness and greater pertinacity than usual.

A friend of his boyhood, an engineer, had spoken to him of Cecilia, and begged him to do his best to interest her on his behalf. The young man was very much pleased with the frank, open way in which his friend spoke on the matter.

"Gonzalo," he said, "I am now at an age and in a position to marry. I did not care about doing so either in Madrid or in Seville, because I mistrust women I have not known for some time. Men ought to marry in their own neighborhood girls they have seen grow up round about them. I determined to marry one of the girls here, and I have set my heart upon your sister-in-law. I will now confide to you my ideas about her: Cecilia is neither pretty nor ugly; she is a passable woman, and I have always thought that such a one makes the best wife. In the four or five times I have met her at the Saldanas I found her very friendly, reasonable, frank, and modest. Her girl friends all speak well of her, which fact men don't take sufficiently into account when they are thinking of marriage, for girls are implacable, and bear eter-

nal grudges against each other. Besides, your sister-in-law will have a nice fortune shortly. I don't see why I should not mention it, because it is another fact which should be borne in mind. I don't see why men should systematically marry poor women. Marriage increases a man's expenses; children cause a considerable outlay; and all these things have to be taken into account. But I have no need to marry for fortune. I have rather a lucrative profession, and my parents will leave me some money. Will you ask her if she has found me to her taste the few times I have talked with her, and if she will allow me to call on her?"

Gonzalo promised to use his influence on his behalf, while he could not help prophesying success to his friend's designs, for he was conscious of the influence he exercised over his sister-in-law, and she had never hitherto neglected any of his wishes.

"If I am not able to bring it about, nobody can," he added in a burst of spontaneous confidence and pride. So that same evening, when Cecilia came to light his lamp in his study, he said to her with a smile:

"Are you busy now, Cecilia? No. Then sit down a minute, I have something to say to you."

The girl looked at him with her large, luminous, soft eyes full of surprise. Gonzalo made her take a seat.

"Have you a lover?" he asked bruskly.

"What a question!" she exclaimed, with a face smiling and unabashed.

"I am not speaking of a formal lover. If you had one I should have been told. I only want to know whether, among the young men who pay attention to you, any one has succeeded in finding favor with you."

"Why do you want to know?"

"Answer."

Cecilia made a negative gesture.

"Then I am going to take the liberty of speaking to you on behalf of one who has appealed to me. I mean my friend, Paco Flores, whom you know. He has begged me to intercede for him, and to ask you if you have found him objectionable the few times he has talked with you."

"Objectionable?" she asked in surprise. "Why? I do not dislike anybody as long as they behave well."

"Then he asked me if you would consent to his calling here."

"That is another matter," she returned, suddenly becoming serious. "I can not hinder his calling here, but if my consent thereto implies my liking his visits, I am not disposed to give it."

"It is not a question of your accepting him as a bridegroom," Gonzalo quickly said; "he only wants you to give him a little time, and then if you consider him worthy of your hand you can take him, and if not, you can refuse him."

"Well, it is refused now, and without need of any further talk," returned the girl with firmness.

"That is very sudden," said Gonzalo, smiling to conceal his vexation at her brusk refusal.

"It seems to me that in these matters the sincerer we are, the better it is for all parties. Why should this young man trouble himself to visit here for some time only to receive the answer that I can give him to-day?"

"Well, well, let us proceed calmly. If Paco is not antipathetic to you, as you say, you can not be sure that you may not fall in love with him by the end of six or eight months or a year."

"I am incapable of falling in love," she said, with a bitter smile that was incomprehensible to her brother-in-law.

"Love comes when least expected," Gonzalo observed sententiously. "We may go years and years without it, and then one day, paf! the heart gives a bound, because we have met our other half."

These words, so simple and yet so cruel, stirred the gall-like bitterness of her heart. With her eyes fixed on one of the arms of the chair in which she was seated, she said, in rapid, hard tones:

"Well, I am certain my heart will never go off, paf! one day."

"Why are you so certain, Cecilia? Women, more than men, are made for the delights of love and for family life."

Cecilia listened to him in silence; her face was severe, and her eyes were fixed on space.

The words of her brother-in-law sent a note of desolation through her heart. Yes, it was true, unfortunately it was all true! When he had finished the apology for love, he made one for his friend, Paco Flores: such a nice young fellow, too; so courteous, the son of a good family, with a brilliant career, etc., etc.

But Cecilia was firm in refusing her consent to his coming to the house. Then Gonzalo, somewhat vexed at her obstinacy, and wounded in his self-love for having boasted of his influence with his sister-in-law, uttered some rather cruel remarks.

"Perhaps he is not grand enough for you! Paco is not rich, but he can certainly aspire to your hand. There is no better fellow in Sarrio; nobody can say that the marriage would be an unequal one. Oh, perhaps you expect a prince of the blood! But take care lest you make a great mistake, for woman's youth soon passes, and many chances are lost like this."

The girl listened to her brother-in-law's oration till it was over without moving a muscle. When it was finished, she quietly rose from her seat, and quickly left the room. On crossing the passage on the way to her room two large tears rolled down her cheeks.

CHAPTER XX

DON ROSENDO'S EXAMPLE

AFTER his glorious duel the gallant Belinchon wore the laurels of his well-earned fame with becoming modesty. There are chroniclers who are not of this opinion, but then their dissent is grounded upon the discovery of certain annoyances to which the worthy gentleman subjected some of the townsfolk, while ignoring the fact that such annoyances did not take place simultaneously with the reported duel, but some time later.

Chronology is always an important element of history, and in this particular instance it gives a satisfactory explanation of the acts of our hero. During the first excitement of the event he was accorded the marks of admiration indisputably due to him; even his enemies regarded him with respect mingled with admiration when they saw him pass. Then Don Rosendo, instead of abusing his recognized superiority, as any other man of less force of character and modesty would have done, preserved his same stately, quiet demeanor, and walked along the streets as gravely and unpreten-

tiously as hitherto—a noble example of magnanimity, which, however, instead of redounding to his credit, only exposed him to attacks.

The Cabin soon began to make light of the affair, and malignant stress was laid upon the exaggerated accounts of the backward jumps given by the founder of "The Light of Sarrio" in the duel. These jokes, of which it can well be supposed Gabino Maza was the originator, did not stop in the precincts of the Club, for they soon spread through the whole place, so that at the end of a few days the majority of the townsfolk smiled ironically when the duel of honor was mentioned.

Don Rosendo became conscious of this state of things, not only by his ears, but also by his eyes, for he noticed that the respectful, courteous glances of his neighbors were gradually exchanged for a rude sort of behavior, shown in turning their heads away when he approached, or in ill-suppressed laughter when they passed him in a narrow street.

What was he to do in such a case? Indisputably it was time to lay aside modesty and make rude fellows feel the dignity of his noble art of self-defense.

The first sign he gave of the scorn and contempt in which he held his enemies was to spit upon the ground when any of the party passed him, to demonstrate his loathing for them. As soon as the rea-

son of this act dawned upon the faction, the more timid, fearing that lightning might follow the rain, took care to avoid him; the braver ones, however, passed him without heeding the scornful act, but they dared not look him in the face. At the end of some time several took it calmly as a joke, and said to one another with a laugh:

"I say, I have just met Don Rosendo."

"Well, did he spit at you?"

"I should think he did!"

Thus the Cabin party made fun of our great patrician, and rude practical jokes were played on him.

In one of these it was arranged that all the members of the Cabin should pass by him in single file, at a certain distance from each other, which was such a strain on Don Rosendo's power or desire to spit that his throat became quite sore and unequal to the continual effort. But Gabino Maza, who took the whole matter quite seriously, said he would see if that ox (the word is strong, but it is textual) would dare spit when he passed. And, in fact, Don Rosendo had always abstained from doing it at him, as he thought that a certain amount of consideration was due to the head of the opposite party.

But one evening, when he was carrying his head rather high, being somewhat excited after reading the account of a certain duel between two Yankees,

it suddenly occurred to him to spit, in a provocative way, as he came across Gabino Maza, close to the Café de la Marina. Whereupon Gabino became white with rage, and, seizing him by the wrist, he said, in a tone of fury:

"Listen to me, you great fool, you shan't spit at me like that; no, not if you were in the last stage of phthisis, do you hear?"

As a conventional man, well versed in affairs of honor, Don Rosendo said nothing at the moment, but on the following day he did not leave the house, as he waited for Maza's challenge, which, happily for him, did not come.

In spite of everything Don Rosendo's dueling energy excited emulation in the town. Thanks to our hero, there arose a great taste for the exercise of arms, and many of the most distinguished townsfolk went in enthusiastically for the art of fencing.

Not only the staff of "The Light" and the members of the Club practised the science of Monsieur Lemaire, but the members of the Cabin, recognizing the importance of the art, established a fencing academy in a warehouse near by, and put at its head a retired cavalry officer who had wielded the foil in Madrid. The immediate consequence of this step was that all the disputes that now arose between the Club and the Cabin were formally settled with all the ceremonious etiquette of the code of honor.

Hardly a week went by without the town being excited at the going and coming of seconds, meetings held in corners of cafés, while the proceedings were published in "The Light" and in the Lancian papers. But out of twenty disputes nineteen would end in an amicable agreement, drawn up and signed by the seconds.

So that, although these affairs of honor were conducted in accordance with the usual procedure, they involved nothing more serious than the blow or insult which gave rise to the quarrel.

On rare occasions, when a great deal of feeling was excited, a meeting was arranged. Delaunay called out Don Rufo for a paragraph in "The Future" in which it was stated that the doctors did not go the round of the hospital at the prescribed hours, and some sword-strokes were interchanged. The printer Folgueras also had an encounter with Marin's son-in-law for having omitted to bow to him.

In both cases nothing worse than a few sword-cuts was administered.

The most noteworthy affair was that between Don Rudesindo and Don Pedro Miranda, who, after vacillating for some time, finally joined the Cabin party.

The origin of the quarrel was the slaughter-house problem, the occasion the following: Don Pedro was heard one day to say that Don Rude-

sindo only remained on Belinchon's side because he did not want the slaughter-house built on the Plaza de las Meanas, as it would affect his house property there.

The cider manufacturer, hearing of this remark, spoke insultingly of Don Pedro at the Club, and appeared exceedingly angry at the imputation, although, in fact, he was not so much so as he pretended to be.

Alvaro Peña, who was never so happy as when he had a duel on hand, hastened to say in a loud voice, with his characteristic arrogance:

"Look out, Don Rudesindo, Miranda must give you satisfaction. Would you like to leave it to me to settle?"

The good manufacturer felt as if he would willingly have eaten the words he had let drop, but Peña was such an impetuous fellow. Why the devil had he said he would like to kick Don Pedro downstairs, when, in truth, he had just met him as he was leaving home, and had passed him without uttering a word! But more than twenty people were now present, and he was in the wretched position of being obliged to reply to the officer in the least aggressive tone he could command:

"Very well, you may do so if you think it is worth the trouble."

"But it is not a case of worth. Do you think you are only on our side to be exposed to such low

remarks? Why, they are an insult to you. I say, Don Feliciano, a word with you."

Don Feliciano and he then conferred together in a corner for a few short minutes, and then sallied forth into the street. Don Rudesindo remained apparently calm, but inwardly much incensed against Peña, against the Club, against himself, and against the mother who bore him. What necessity was there for him to embroil himself, a married man with children, whose whole life had been spent in working like a slave to amass a little capital? And now that he had got it—for this fellow's humbug—it was a fine thing! And the manufacturer could hardly swallow the sips of cognac with which he was regaling himself.

The affair was quickly arranged. Don Pedro Miranda was quite taken aback at the visit of Peña and Don Feliciano. He said that he had no recollection—that he had no spite whatsoever against Don Rudesindo, on the contrary— But Peña interrupted him by saying:

"Very well, Don Pedro, we can't listen to all that. Just name two friends, who will arrange with us."

The poor proprietor suggested Gabino Maza and Delaunay, and as one of these was a choleric, fiery man, and the other a bad-hearted fellow, no pacification was possible. All explanations were refused. The duel was arranged to take place in

the early morning, and swords were the weapons to be used.

When Don Rudesindo heard it, he cursed the day he saw the light, and his adversary threw himself onto a sofa and asked for a cup of lime juice. However, there was nothing to be done but to obey the call of honor, and we dare not say whether they were impelled thereto by their own free will or by extraneous circumstances.

At six in the morning Peña and Don Feliciano on one side, and Maza and Delaunay on the other, dragged them from their homes to the old cemetery. What lugubrious fancies passed through Don Pedro Miranda's head as he journeyed thither! They were only comparable to those that assailed Don Rudesindo on the same journey. Before arriving, Peña said to him:

"I am quite sure, Don Rudesindo, that you will settle him, and I feel primed with courage. Don't push yourself, but you have a difficult part to play, very difficult!"

The manufacturer would have sacrificed all his property at that moment to have found it not only difficult but impossible.

"Don Pedro is not firm on his legs; besides, he is short in the arm. But, as you know, in fighting there is nothing certain, and it is always the unexpected that happens. If you have any last requests to make, make them before we arrive."

Don Rudesindo shuddered. He remained silent for some time as he walked along, and finally, drawing some papers from his pocket, he gave them to his friend, saying in a stifled voice:

"If I perish give these to Señor Benito."

Two tears then gathered in his eyes.

"Do you mean Señor Benito the Rat?" asked Peña.

Don Rudesindo did not hear him. He had walked quickly on to hide his emotion. Why the name of his clerk should upset him so much at that moment we can not explain. Perhaps in the great crises of life we are suddenly apprised of the existence of strong, deep feelings hitherto unsuspected.

The old cemetery, to be put in order a short time later, was then overrun with grass and briers.

The wooden crosses had rotted away, and the only evidence of its being the home of the dead lay in the two skulls encrusted in the wall on either side of the gate.

These skulls were certainly not conducive to raising Don Rudesindo's spirits. We do not know about Don Pedro, but we suspect that the effect was no more pleasant upon him.

Some time was spent in finding a convenient spot, as the nettles and briers rendered it impossible for the combatants to take their places.

While Peña and the seconds of the other side

busied themselves about this most solemn task, good Don Feliciano Gomez committed the indiscretion (God bless him for it!) of going up to Don Pedro Miranda, who, with his white face, frightened eyes, and his inside upset by the fabulous amount of lime juice he had imbibed that night, was leaning against the wall, waiting for the seconds to finish their task, and looking like a criminal condemned to death.

"Hello, Don Pedro! Cold, eh? Caramba! what a morning! Look here; fancy a man leaving his bed for this! Goodness gracious! [*Silence, interrupted by a few groans from the unhappy Miranda.*] I would have given my little finger, not to have had to assist at such an atrocity! But they say it was a favor that can not be refused. Well, I suppose it can not when it is a matter of a serious offense. But what is the serious offense in this case? Come, let us see, let us hear. What is it? Would to God! would to God! [*Fresh silence and fresh groans from Don Pedro, who finished by dropping his head resignedly upon his breast as if he were putting it upon the block.*] How much better it would be to be in bed taking chocolate, eh, my boy?" continued Don Feliciano, putting his hand upon his shoulder with great familiarity. To this remark Miranda uttered an almost inaudible guttural sound of assent.

"Yes, I should think so," said the merchant.

"For whatever they say, I can not believe that you want to kill Don Rudesindo, a neighbor who has been your friend up to a little while ago, who has grown up with you and went to school with you."

"I do not want—at all," murmured Don Pedro, as if his head were still upon the block.

"That's right!" exclaimed Don Feliciano, giving him a hearty slap on the shoulder. "I said so, and Don Rudesindo feels the same. Then who wants to kill whom? Come, let us hear." And he cast his eyes around, seeking for an answer to his question.

Peña, Maza, and Delaunay were at some distance, hidden among the cypresses. Don Rudesindo, also leaning against the wall, was about fifty paces off.

Then the merchant, filled by a sudden and heavenly inspiration, made a sign for him to approach.

Don Rudesindo came slowly toward him with a timid, hesitating step.

"Tell me, dear fellow, have you any desire to kill Don Rudesindo?" asked the merchant of Miranda.

"None whatever," he murmured.

"Have you any wish to wound him?"

"Hardly. I have always esteemed Don Rudesindo," stammered the man of property.

"Eh? What? What do you say?" cried Don Feliciano in a tone of triumph. "That you have always esteemed Don Rudesindo? Eh, my dear fellow? You said so?"

"Yes, señor."

"Tell me, Don Rudesindo" (taking a few steps toward the cider manufacturer), "do you wish to kill Don Pedro, a neighbor who has hitherto been your friend, who has grown up with you, and who went with you to Don Martia's school?"

"I? Why should I?" said the merchant, opening his eyes wide in distress.

"Would you wish to wound him?"

"No, nor do him the least harm. I have always considered him a real friend."

"How is this, eh? A real friend, eh? Then, in my humble opinion, I think you ought both to embrace each other."

Hardly had Don Feliciano uttered these words than Miranda and Don Rudesindo, by a simultaneous impulse, rushed into each other's arms, and embraced with such effusion that the bones in their bodies were all but broken.

Don Feliciano at the same time bared his bald, retreating forehead, and, waving his hat wildly for some minutes, he shouted:

"Hurrah!"

I do not know to whom this hurrah was ad-

dressed if not to the astute spirit to whom he owed his brilliant idea.

At that moment the seconds approached and gazed with surprise at what was going on.

They tried to look pleased at the turn the affair had taken, and soon went their different ways. But that evening at the Club Peña sharply reprimanded Don Feliciano for his conduct, going so far as to say that he had put him in a ridiculous position, and that, did he not look upon him as a friend of long standing and older than himself, he would ask satisfaction.

"Satisfaction?" exclaimed the optimistic Don Feliciano. "What next will you ask, you exacting creature?"

"Would you refuse to fight me?" asked the officer in a ringing voice.

"What should we fight about?"

"What you like."

"I for dancing a fandango or a bolero, my dear fellow," he returned, as he proceeded to dance up and down the room, and snap his fingers until his hat fell off and exposed his bald head to view.

The members of the Club rolled on the sofas with laughter, and Peña, after giving vent to some contemptuous remarks, retired from the scene in vexation and disgust.

CHAPTER XXI

OUR ESTEEMED CONTEMPORARY

CONSTANTLY attacked in "The Light," the worthies of the Cabin finally decided to start another paper, in which they could avenge the injustices to which they had been exposed.

This entailed an enormous sacrifice, because very few among them were rich. The only one that could be called so was Don Pedro Miranda, and he would rather have a tooth drawn than loosen his purse-strings.

By dint of meetings, touting, asking help from different quarters, and making collections at the Cabin, they ended by getting the requisite sum of money for setting up a printing-press, as Folgueras was not willing to print the publication, nor did they wish to humiliate themselves by asking such a favor. When the printing apparatus, modest as it was, was all in order, the occasion was celebrated by the indispensable banquet, at which it was decided to name the new organ "The Youth of Sarrio," and all its supporters glowed with enthusiasm for its prosperity and with desire for the destruction of its vile enemies.

The appearance of the first number, bearing a vignette representing a youth surrounded with rows of books for his perusal and delectation, caused a great sensation in the town, and it deserved it. The members of the Cabin, who had been powerless to resent the insults heaped upon them by "The Light" for many months, now avenged themselves with interest. Santo Cristo de Rodillero, what a stream of insults and attacks! From the beginning to the end it was full of caustic attacks on the members of the Club. They did not openly call one a rogue, another a villain, another a brute, another a humbug, and so forth, but they spoke of them under names by which no one could fail to recognize them. Belinchon was called "Don Quixote," and Don Rudesindo "Sancho," Sinforoso the "Marquis of Kicks," and Peña "Captain Choleric," etc. And shielded thus, they attacked them in a most merciless fashion, and did not leave them a leg to stand on.

Sticks were used at night on the Rua Nueva. Folgueras, who had also his share of insults in "The Youth of Sarrio," met Gabino Maza and leveled a blow at his head, which Maza returned with interest, and Folgueras renewed the attack, for a compositor came to his assistance, and his opponent was seconded by his son-in-law, which made the brawl look quite alarming.

"The Youth of Sarrio" was published every

Sunday. Periquito Miranda was glad of an outlet for his poetic vein, as his father's quarrel with the Club had arrested the demand for his effusions in that quarter; but it now overflowed in numberless sonnets, odes, acrostics, and other metrical combinations which bore witness to his platonic love for the wife of the manager of the steel factory, a great, elephantine, stout Frenchwoman who could easily have put him in her pocket. But we know that Periquito had a predilection for ponderous, portly specimens of womankind. He found that the form of *dreams* was his best mode of expressing the feelings which assailed and tormented his soul. The platonic youth dreamed in verse that he was in a lovely grotto, where a nymph with waving arms invited him to repose upon a couch of roses and green grasses. Another time he was on the summit of a very high mountain, when on the billowy clouds in the distant horizon a form of a woman (the wife of the manager) took shape; the clouds approached, the woman was white as driven snow, glorious and splendid as a magnolia flower, and the beautiful apparition finally came toward him and bore him off to azure space, encircled in her arms. Another time he was sailing in a little ship on the ocean waves. The ship foundered, and he descended to the briny depths to be welcomed by a fair and most beautiful nymph (always the wife of the manager), who

took him by the hand, led him to a magnificent crystal palace, seated him at her side on a marble throne, and invited him to the nuptial ceremony to the strains of sweet music, after which she escorted him to an apartment which was a marvel of decoration.

These dreams of bliss, put into facile verse yet adorned with a certain poetic gravity, caused some anxiety among the paterfamiliases. Periquito daily ate more and grew thinner.

"The Light" of the following Thursday, after loading the chief members of the Cabin with insults, attacked the poet under the malicious, satirical pseudonym of Pericles.

A fierce and incessant warfare thus arose between "The Light" and "The Youth of Sarrio," and the columns of both papers were filled with mutual insults and recriminations.

It seldom happened that a number of either of the publications appeared without giving rise to some blows or a brawl, if not to a formal duel. Nevertheless, they became more chary in this respect. It was an easy matter to be a second for any contending parties, but to use a sword or pistol on one's own behalf was another matter. The spirit of controversy inflamed the minds of the townsfolk; many people who had remained indifferent in the disputes between the Club and the Cabin ended by joining one side or the other, in

some cases because they took up the cudgels on behalf of their relations, and in other cases merely because the dispute aroused a kindred feeling in their bellicose temperaments.

The place was soon divided into two parties. The side which boasted of Don Rosendo as its worthy chief was the most numerous, and it consisted of almost all the rich merchants of Sarrio. That of the Cabin was smaller, numbering the landowners and the timorous religious people who had been scandalized by "The Light."

The dissension increased to such a degree that in a short time those that belonged to one side totally ignored those of the opposite party, although they had been good friends hitherto.

"The Light" and "The Youth of Sarrio" began to criticize each other's style and grammar, eagerly seizing upon any mistakes of syntax, and finding as much fault with the diction as with the verbs.

"This word is not Castilian," said "The Youth of Sarrio."

"The word *desilusionar,* which the pettifoggers of 'The Youth of Sarrio' say is not Castilian," returned "The Light," "we have seen used by the most eminent writers of Madrid, such as Ferez, Gonzalez, Martinez, etc. This time, as usual, the organ of the Cabin has overreached itself."

"The Youth" replied to this remark, "The Light" retorted; instances from the grammar, dic-

tionary, and distinguished authors were quoted, and at last nobody knew what to think.

"The Youth of Sarrio" was condemned for using the preposition *de* after *debia* when referring to the Calle de Atras requiring to be repaired.

"A *de* too much, dear student."

"But when the verb is used conditionally," returned "The Youth," "the *de* is required. Have the editors of 'The Light' been to school, or not?"

"We have been to school," was the reply, "to greater purpose, as it seems, than all the fools of the Cabin, and we know that in the present case the verb *deber* is not used conditionally."

"Yes, it is." "No, it is not." And things went on as before, although sometimes they spoke of referring the questions to the Academy of Language. "Don Juan Tenorio," by Zorilla, was often quoted, and citations from "El Curioso Parlante" were brought to bear on the questions at issue.

This grammatical controversy drove people to the study of a science of which they had hitherto been ignorant. The effect was the same at both the Club and the Cabin, and two or three copies of the latest grammar of the Academy were constantly in request.

The most venomous of the linguistic attacks were those directed against Don Rosendo, whom it was considered expedient to crush in respect of his being the head and soul of his party. Belinchon

had never studied grammar, except in his childhood, but like all superior spirits, if he did not know it he divined it. His opponents were constantly bringing to light a thousand anachronisms in his articles, but such was the confidence with which his powerful mind inspired them that they never credited these remarks, and only regarded them as pure calumnies. If there had been no grammar, Belinchon, with all his natural gifts, would have been capable of inventing one. Nobody was a greater master than he of the language of the press, bright and brilliant, full of phrases made sacred by the use of a hundred writers.

Thanks to his wonderful style, Don Rosendo could write an article on the liberty of culture with the same facility as he could pen an informal account of the fishing industry.

His enemies said that he used Gallicisms. And what if he did? The mere fact of a writer of such repute using them converted them into the purest Castilian.

This anxiety to show up the Gallicisms of "The Light" was one of the manias of "The Youth of Sarrio," or "The Local Student," as it was always called by the other publication, anxious to show the withering contempt it had for it by not even giving it its proper name. By the use of a certain old dictionary in the possession of one of the members of the Cabin they were merciless in their

attacks on the articles and the novelettes in "The Light." If Don Rosendo said in courteous language that for want of *conveniancias* he could not touch upon certain subjects, "The Youth" called him to book in a sarcastic style. Where did the clever Don Quixote (as they almost always called Belinchon) learn this use of the word *conveniencia?* It was certainly not in the famous history written by Cervantes. If he used the word *gubernamental* or *banal,* or the phrase *Tener lugar,* what bursts of derision from "The Youth of Sarrio"! What mockery! What scorn! This lasted until the Club got hold of another dictionary of Gallicisms, and then both papers became so involved on the subject that they ended by ignoring purism, and returning to their free, happy, independent style.

Moreover, the controversy had become so heated that classic terms were insufficient for the conveyance of their insults.

In all the articles such terms as "venomous reptile," "despicable creatures," "obtuse brains," "wallowing in the mire," "ignoble and degraded beings," were adopted on both sides.

Tired of insulting each other, they proceeded to lead the attack into the family life, and modest wives and venerable fathers were soon not safe from the shafts. "The Youth of Sarrio" was the first to start in that quarter by publishing an Arab

story called "The Eastern Slave," in which form an exact relation was given of the history of Doña Paula and her marriage with Don Rosendo (Mahomad Zegri), flavored with low-toned remarks and shameful insinuations. Belinchon felt inclined to call the staff out, but thinking it would only add fuel to the fire and look as if the cap fitted him, he decided to confine his revenge to the organ of the press.

Sinforoso, at his request, then wrote an Indian story, in which the life and shady doings of Maza's father figured, for he had been a slave-owner, and had made his fortune in trafficking in human flesh. Henceforth Eastern stories were freely told on both sides as instruments for laying bare the peccadillos of either party.

The widest field for strife, and the richest in results for both the Club and the Cabin, was that of politics. The eyes of both parties turned in that direction, and no opportunities were lost for skirmishes and conquests. Until this division in the town, politics, as we know, had played but a small part in Sarrio. But from that time it became the constant subject, the indispensable element of all masculine conversation.

No one had hitherto thought of referring to Rojas Salcedo on the subject of the mayor's reelection, because Don Roque was the friend of everybody, and had represented the district for eighteen

years. Nevertheless, as the time of the municipal elections drew near, letters were sent from both parties on the matter.

It must be mentioned that the members of the Club wished at all cost to have Don Roque deposed from the municipal chair, because on more than one occasion, in the exercise of his duties, he had sided with the opposite party at the expense of his old friends.

"The Light" repudiated him on this account. The enmity increased. Don Roque in revenge abused his authority by sending Folgueras to prison, and the attacks of "The Light" proceeded with redoubled fury. Don Roque being now regarded as a tyrant of the Middle Ages, began to fear for his life, and went about night and day accompanied by the veteran Marcones.

It was said that his death was decreed at a secret meeting of the members of the Club, so the hair of the poor mayor stood on end with terror if he espied any of "The Light" party in a lonely quarter, and he promptly turned his steps in an opposite direction.

Rojas Salcedo replied to the members of the Cabin that if Don Roque were elected councilor he would be reelected mayor. At the same time he secretly wrote to the members of the Club, charging them to do their best to prevent his being elected, and in this way he sided with both parties.

But the partizans of Belinchon triumphed all along the line by reason of their numbers, their riches, and their open-handedness. The struggle was finally concentrated on the matter of Don Roque. The members of the Cabin knew that if he were elected the battle would be won, because he would be mayor, and the power of that office would outweigh any other influence in the corporation. The Club was also quite alive to the fact, so both sides fought with the fiercest zeal. At last the old mayor was defeated at the election by a small number of votes. Confused and cast down, his eyes terribly inflamed and his face so livid that it was fearful to see, he finally retired home after spending the whole day at the Town Hall. A king robbed of his crown could not have felt the blow more keenly. He arrived at his house without an escort, like any ordinary being. He had seen Marcones in the corridor, and he was certain Marcones had seen him, but he had not ventured to ask him to accompany him home, as the old official was standing talking obsequiously to Don Rufo, his enemy, and pretended not to see his old chief pass by. It was not that Marcones turned to the rising sun, but, imbued with the principle of modern statesmanship, he understood that the public force ought always to be at the service of the reigning power.

And yet it was really more necessary for Don

Roque to be escorted home than it had hitherto been. Besides suffering from a shock that went to his heart, he felt physically indisposed. These long hours of agony, suspense, receiving contradictory reports at every minute, on no nourishment but drops of gin since the morning, had worked a dreadful change in him. His legs shook and his sight failed. To reach his home he had to support himself several times against the wall. On his arrival at the door the old servant who opened it started back aghast, the face of her master looked as if his throat was being squeezed by pitiless, invisible hands. Although she was always able to interpret the confused, indistinguishable sounds that issued from his mouth, she could not understand a word he said on this occasion. Seeing him go straight to his room, she took him a glass and some water. But Don Roque in a fury dashed the glass to the ground, and roared like a person possessed with the devil. However, it was impossible to understand what those hollow, fearful, demoniacal sounds meant which rose to his mouth, and before issuing forth resounded four or five times in the enormous cavities of his throat. Trembling and alarmed, she ran to fetch a bottle of wine. Although somewhat appeased, he declined to take it, and he repeated with greater emphasis, but with no more clearness, the order that he had given. At last, by dint of sharpening her wits, the ser-

vant managed to understand that her master wanted some rum punch. Don Roque, seeing that she had understood him, became calm; he took off the enormous greatcoat in which he was enveloped, then his frock coat, then tried to take off his boots; his noble municipal countenance assumed the color of Valdepeñas wine, but he could not bring the undertaking to a satisfactory conclusion, so when the servant came with the punch she completed it for him.

Then he said he was going to bed, and the doors were to be well locked, and he was not to be disturbed on any pretext whatsoever. The servant did not understand a word of this discourse, but divining the purport, she withdrew.

Don Roque then threw himself on to his bed, drew the clothes up, and with his back against the pillows, he took the glass of punch and put it to his lips. On discovering that there was a deficiency in one of the ingredients, he uttered a guttural, awful sound, and rising from the bed, he fetched the bottle of rum from his cupboard and put it on the little table by the bedside.

Then once more in bed, he gravely and solemnly proceeded, with the glass in one hand and the bottle in the other, to repair the servant's error. He took a sip of punch and then filled up the glass from the bottle, and the concoction thus strengthened was more befitting the state of agitation which

possessed his mind, for under that apparent calm Don Roque's brain was wild with excitement. All the hours of the day passed before him in their sad and depressing course—the deceptions he had endured, the disappointed hopes, the heated discussions, and finally the desertion of Marcones.

And then the future. That was of the blackest description. Was he to resign the mayor's mace that he had wielded with glory so many years, to turn into a nobody without an escort, a private person, not to have the run of the Town Hall, not to pass by any of the corporation officials, and not to be able to say: "Juan, go to Rabila well, and don't let the servants be cleaning their pails there"?

If he saw a stonebreaker in the road, was he not to have the power of telling him to strike harder or gentler, to raise the ax less or more?

His feet were intensely cold. He got up two or three times to put the clothes thicker over them, but his efforts were fruitless. The contents of the bottle finally passed to the glass, and from the glass to his stomach. A pleasant heat then pervaded his inside and gradually permeated through all his members. Don Roque then felt his tongue loosen, and he began to talk to himself, very distinctly in his own opinion, but if any mortals had been in earshot they would have retreated in horror.

Sounds like all, call, mall seemed to figure most frequently in the monologue, from which a per-

spicacious philologue, taking into account the combination of the vowel *a* and the consonant *l*, would have deduced the probability that the word expressed by the mayor was rascal, and this would have been a more or less legitimate deduction.

At last he was silent. He felt a fiery heat in his throat, which passed to his head and face. His tongue declined to move. He experienced a sensation of physical increase of his whole being; his head especially seemed to grow; it grew in such a measureless way that it overpowered him.

At the same time the objects about him—the cupboard, bed, washstand, and the sticks standing in the corner—appeared to grow small. He seemed to hear in his head the noise of the machinery of a clock in motion, a wheel that went round swiftly, and a hammer that fell rhythmically with a metallic sound. The hammer ceased and the wheel went on.

He thought he heard strange noises in the street that petrified him with fear. Poor Don Roque did not know that his enemies were at that moment treating him to "rough music." He thought of calling the servant, but feared that the sounds were imaginary, as they had been before. And, in fact, he was confirmed in this idea by hearing a deafening clang of bells, a discordant sound in which all seemed mingled, from the largest bell of Toledo to the smallest hand-bell.

How bewildering! how fatiguing! Fortunately it ceased with a final loud clang, but it was immediately succeeded by a whistle so long and so sharp that it seemed it must break his tympanum, and he instinctively raised his hands to his ears. On the cessation of the whistle he thought that the foot of the bed went up and the head went down, until his feet were above his head, which was a most agonizing sensation. He then gave a long sigh, and his feet returned to their normal level; but as the same proceeding was repeated several times, he had to give repeated long sighs to regain his normal position.

But that fantastic operation did not warm Don Roque's feet. They were like two pieces of ice, while the rest of his body was burning hot. His head especially rose to a fearful temperature that increased every minute. When he raised his hand to his forehead it seemed like a flame, and he seemed to hear the voice of his wife, who died twenty years ago, calling, "Roque! Roque! Roque!" The teeth of the mayor chattered with terror. He lost sight of the cupboard, the walls of the bedroom, and the objects about him, and saw in their place a million lights of all colors that were at first motionless and then began to dance violently. By dint of crossing and recrossing each other they formed solid circles—one blue, one red, one violet —that danced around him and became more strik-

ing than the solar spectrum. At last the circles also disappeared, leaving one single, luminous, hardly perceptible point. But that point slowly increased; it was first a star, then a moon, then an enormous sun that grew gradually larger as it assumed a blood-red hue. This sun increased and increased until its immense disk grew to the size of an ox, then it partially overshadowed him, then it covered him completely, and then he suddenly knew no more. And the good mayor, indeed, saw no more, for in the morning he was found dead, with his head fallen forward, a case of apoplectic seizure.

CHAPTER XXII

LOCAL POLITICS

SEÑOR ANSELMO, the conductor of the band of Sarrio, came to tell the President of the Academy that the mayor threatened to stop the orchestra supplies if it attended St. Anthony's fair that afternoon.

"How is that?" asked Don Mateo, raising himself up in bed, where he still was, and stretching out his hand for his spectacles on a little table by his side. "Stop supplies! Why should he stop the supplies?"

"I don't know. Prospero has just sent to tell me so."

"What has the band's going to St. Anthony's fair to do with him?" he returned in a tone of irritation.

"I think it is because a gentleman is arriving to-day at Don Rosendo's, and as the fair will block the road—"

"Ah, yes, the Duke of Tornos; but what has that to do with it? Come, they are mad— Look here, leave me an instant. I am going to dress, and then I will go and see Maza. I dare say we shall be able to arrange matters. Leave me."

Señor Anselmo left the room, and quicker than could have been expected from his years and infirmities, Don Mateo appeared, ready to go out. His wife and his daughter were, as usual, at church. He asked for some breakfast.

"I can not give it to you, sir. The señora has the keys, and there is no chocolate out."

"Always the same!" grumbled the old man, not so vexed as he ought to have been. "I don't know why she can't leave out what is necessary. It is true that I generally get up late, but there may be cases of important business, like to-day."

"Shall I go and ask for an ounce of chocolate from a neighbor?"

"No, there is no need. I am sure Matilda would be vexed. Is there nothing to eat handy?"

The servant did not answer for some seconds.

"No, señor; there is nothing. You know that the señora—'"

"Yes, yes, I know."

Don Mateo went to the sideboard and began pulling open the drawers. Nothing—there was nothing but the table utensils: spoons, forks, corkscrew, etc.; but some chocolate drops and a plate of biscuits could be seen through the glass cupboard door.

"Caramba! if there were only a key," and drawing out his own bunch he proceeded to try the lock with each key on the ring, but his efforts were

fruitless. At last in despair he readjusted his spectacles, put on his hat, and was starting off on his expedition, saying:

"Well, well, we will fast to-day."

But before arriving at the door he turned round and said abruptly to the maid:

"Is there any bread about?"

"The baker has not come yet, but you can have some of mine," returned the girl, smiling.

"All right; let me see this bread of yours."

So they repaired to the kitchen, and the servant lifting the lid from the bread-pan, Don Mateo took out a moderate-sized piece of almost black rye bread.

"All right; I don't object to your black bread," he said, cutting himself a piece. "Health to the darkies," he then added, with a jocoseness he had not ventured to display for years, as he swallowed a mouthful. The servant smiled, astonished at his good humor.

"It has more flavor than ours. If it were not quite so hard!"

He then brushed away the crumbs with his hand, readjusted his spectacles, and after taking a draft of water—for the wine was also locked up—he sallied forth in the direction of the Town Hall. The clock of the building was striking ten. He passed through the great portico, mounted the wide, stone staircase, and arriving at the corridor, where the

dust was more than an inch thick, he asked Marcones, who came forward, for Don Gabino.

"The mayor is sitting."

"Sitting! The deuce he is! At this hour?"

It was, in fact, a rare occurrence. Two years had elapsed since the death of Don Roque, and those of the Club who then took office at the Town Hall with Don Rufo as mayor for more than a year and a half were now reaping the consequences of subsequent defeat. They were still in the majority in the municipal corporation, but the Cabin party finally worked so effectually in Madrid that Gabino Maza was elected mayor. It was said that this was due to the hateful treachery of Rojas Salcedo, who, noting at the previous municipal elections that the power of the Cabin party was on the increase, now went over to that side. Thus the storm of hatred and abuse passed upon him by the supporters of Don Belinchon was indescribable.

A fierce struggle ensued. Each sitting of the Town Council was a disgrace. The Maza party sued the ex-corporation for the depreciation of the funds, demanding reimbursement of the same.

The members of the Belinchon party were quite sure that justice would be accorded them in the Audience Chamber, but on the principle that God helps those who help themselves they brought all possible influence to bear in their favor, and letters went to and from Madrid. The Cabin party was

not, however, remiss in opposition on its side, and Maza made his opponents feel the force of his rod of power. As Don Rosendo's majority consisted only of two votes, Gabino spared no pains to rob him of them. Sometimes he convoked a special meeting when it was impossible for any one of them to come; at other times he sent false notices to certain councilors, saying that the session was postponed; at other times, when a measure was to be put to the vote, he, by common consent with his friends, made it in such an ambiguous way that it confounded Don Rosendo's supporters, and as it happened on more than one occasion, they voted against themselves. Moreover, he once had some councilors locked in the office and took away the key. After the dignitaries of the corporation were weary of calling out and hammering at the door, an official came and opened it, but the voting had taken place without them.

Thanks to these and other tactics, and countless acts of arbitrariness, the choleric ex-naval officer achieved his great object of avenging himself on his enemies. His strategy was chiefly exhibited in attacks where it hurt the most; that is to say, on their house property. If any member of the Club owned one or more houses in a street in which no friend of his own had any property, he ordered the architect of the corporation to level the road and make it lower, by which course the foundations of

the houses were laid bare and the buildings were in danger of falling to the ground, to say nothing of the inconvenience of having to put ladders for ingress. Thus during the few months of his mayoralty there were more than twenty houses in Sarrio with the foundations exposed, and at other times he had the roads raised so that the houses were flooded when it rained.

Such freaks naturally excited a great commotion among Don Belinchon's partizans. Rabid diatribes appeared in "The Light," and incessant scenes took place at the municipal sessions. But Maza took it all quite quietly, and calmly pursued his urban reforms, receiving meanwhile the complaints of his victims with a cruel smile, and giving fierce, sarcastic replies to the speeches of the opposite party.

Marcones took Don Mateo into a room adjoining the sessional chamber. The people's gallery was too small to admit more than one decent-sized person; and, moreover, the disputes of those fighting cocks were of little interest to outsiders. The two notaries of the place were in friendly converse in the same room, Don Victor Varela and Sanjurjo; the first was a little old man, with prominent eyes and such a coarsely made wig that it looked like straw, and the other was a man of middle age with a grayish mustache, afflicted with lameness from his birth. They greeted our old

man like a great friend, and after the manner of people who see each other every day. Indeed, there was nobody in the town who could help greeting Don Mateo.

"You are waiting for the meeting to be over, eh?"

"Yes, señor," returned one of the two men, in so abrupt and cold a tone that the old gentleman felt no desire to pursue the subject further.

He sought for another topic, and hit upon sport as one more congenial to the tastes of the depositaries of public trust. Both were ardent sportsmen after quails, woodcock, etc., but their love of coursing was extreme. Directly any leisure time was at their disposal the swift, innocent animals were subjected to a fearful martyrdom at the hands of these notaries of the corporation, actively seconded by half a dozen greyhounds, kept half starved to quicken their pace.

To talk of hares was next door to heaven to Don Victor; as for Sanjurjo, to stand up to his waist in brambles and to start one was heaven itself.

"What a pity to lose such a day!" exclaimed Don Victor with a sigh as he looked through the window covered with dust.

"True," returned Sanjurjo with another sigh, "but I dare say the ground at Maribona is rather soft; there has been a good deal of rain the last few days."

"What does that matter?" said Don Mateo. "Now in this summer weather it soon gets dry, as the ground so readily absorbs the damp."

The lawyers looked at each other in dismay.

"Pépe la Esquila told me," he continued, "that the peasant folk have seen hares jumping about in Ladreda."

"Yes, we know," said Sanjurjo. "If it were not for some trifle to-day we should have gone off there," and he gave a sign of intelligence to Don Victor.

"Well, Pépe is going this morning with Fermo; I heard so yesterday evening."

The notaries looked at each other in alarm.

"What did I tell you, Sanjurjo?" exclaimed Don Victor.

"Well, I must confess the rogue has taken me in. Never mind, there will be some left. We will go to-morrow, you and I, Don Victor."

But the news had saddened them, and they preserved an obstinate silence. Excited voices and loud noises were audible in the chamber, while the sharp ting of the president's bell was constantly heard calling to order.

Don Mateo, feeling quite depressed at his inability to sustain the conversation, made another attempt with Sanjurjo.

"Well, man, I should not have thought you would have cared for sport with your lame leg."

"What, how? What are you thinking of? He runs like a greyhound," exclaimed Don Victor, with affectionate enthusiasm. "Directly he is on the track of a hare he ceases to be lame. And I say that he invented his lameness to excite pity. He is no more lame than you or I."

"If you could only make me well," returned Sanjurjo, smiling resignedly.

The joke put them all in good spirits. Don Victor recounted the feats of his friend on various occasions:

"One day he went on all fours so as to run better. That was a sight."

"What," queried Don Mateo in astonishment, "on all fours?"

"Yes, it is a fact," returned Sanjurjo, laughing, and adding that he had learned to run like that as a child, when his lameness was more pronounced, and prevented him being a match for his playfellows. Then he, on his side, spoke of Don Victor as a lazy fellow, who would scan every blade of grass to avoid taking an unnecessary step, whereupon Don Victor joined in the laugh against himself, saying that hares were not only started with the legs, but with the eyes as well.

"How many times has your obstinacy ended in failure? Do you recollect that St. Peter's Day three years ago, when you left me alone near Arceanes? Who started the hare then—you, who

went off like the wind, or I, who remained quietly behind?"

The conversation now became more and more animated, to the great delight of Don Mateo, who could never bear to see any one look bored in his presence. When their cheerful talk made them oblivious to the shouts and ringing of the bell going on in the other room, the door was thrown open, and the majestic figure of Don Belinchon appeared in a state of excitement difficult to describe. His hair was disordered, some locks hanging about his face damp with sweat, his cheeks were aflame, his eyes glassy, and the bow of his cravat was undone.

"Sanjurjo, Sanjurjo, come here!" he said in a strange voice, without greeting or even seeing Don Mateo. The notary rose quietly from his seat, and entered the large room with him. Don Victor made no allusion to the sudden exit, but continued quietly talking on the same subject with Don Mateo, who did not dare to ask any questions. At the end of some time Sanjurjo reappeared, shut the door behind him, took his seat again, and continued his interrupted conversation.

But not many minutes elapsed before the door was again roughly opened, and the short, stout form of Don Pedro Miranda appeared in the same state of excitement as that of the former arrival.

"Don Victor, Don Victor, come here!"

He also neither greeted nor saw Don Mateo.

The notary quietly rose from his seat and followed him.

"What the devil does this mean?" asked Don Mateo of Sanjurjo when the door was closed.

The only reply was a scornful shrug of the shoulders.

"What foolery!" grumbled Don Mateo. "Belinchon and Miranda never used to get so excited about these affairs of the corporation, and want to be mayor!"

Things had indeed changed. The violent party feeling that both sides brought to bear in every province was in fuller force in the municipal corporation than anywhere. Maza's tyranny had so infuriated Don Rosendo's friends that they spared no means to contravene it. They wished at all costs to bring an action against him for his abuse of authority. To this end Belinchon had secured the services of the lawyer Sanjurjo, who constantly attended him at the sittings, and drew up statements and statements of the arbitrary conduct of the mayor, all of which were sent to the courts of justice, but there they were blocked, thanks to the ill-will of the judge.

Then the Cabin party employed the other lawyer, who also drew up documents complaining of the insubordination of the majority, and of its carrying resolutions on subjects of which it knew nothing. When the sitting was over Mateo was

taken into the mayor's room. He was found sipping a refreshing concoction which was considered good for the bile, but his system was greatly tried by his daily resort to this remedy for his disorder. He was in an excited, agitated state, for the sardonic smile and scornful calm adopted at the sittings were merely assumed, while his very vitals were consumed with rage, which seemed to turn his blood to gall. What trouble it cost him to repress those wild, blind outbursts of passion which assailed him at every step!

Two of his friends were discussing the meeting, while he, silent and livid, with dark circles under his eyes, stirred his concoction with a spoon. Don Mateo, as one of the very few persons who remained neutral in Sarrio, was received with frankness and affability.

"Take a seat, Don Mateo. What good news brings you here?"

The old man replied that he came to know if the report were true that the band would be put down if it attended the St. Anthony fair that afternoon. The face of Maza darkened. It was quite true that it could no longer count upon any support from the corporation if the instruments were taken out that afternoon from the Academy. Don Mateo asked:

"But why?"

After grinding his teeth as a preface to his re-

mark, Maza replied that he did not wish to celebrate the arrival of a person who was coming that afternoon on a visit to Belinchon, for, he added: "Don Quixote would be quite capable of thinking that the band had attended in honor of his guest."

"But, Gabino, as it has attended every year, nobody could think any such thing. You must bear in mind that this is the chief fair of the town, and that it will be very sad for the young people not to have a little dancing and amusement just then."

"They must do without it to-day. I am very sorry. If the band likes to go it can go, but it knows what it has to expect."

It was impossible to turn him from his decision. At first Don Mateo used persuasion, and then he grew angry, and with the privilege of his years and his unfailing good intentions, which nobody in the town could doubt, he told Maza and his two councilors present a few home truths, which neither they nor the choleric mayor could deny.

"Perhaps you are right, Don Mateo; but what am I to do? A feud is a feud. Our self-respect is at stake. If we don't keep these rascals down they will have us down."

The old man left the consistorial building more sad than angry. The vexations and worries he had suffered of the kind during the last three years were innumerable. He could count on nobody to

second him in any plan for festivities. In vain did he exert himself to get any operatic or dramatic company for the theatre; it soon fell to the ground, for if the Club element prevailed the Cabin party withdrew, and *vice versâ*. And as a general gathering is necessary for a theatrical performance, the actors went off half dead with hunger.

When Don Mateo went about begging for subscriptions, the first thing asked was:

"Has So-and-so subscribed, and So-and-so, and So-and-so?" And if he answered in the affirmative, the reply would be:

"Then do not count upon us."

Our good friend tried at last to win them over by diplomacy, but the implacable townsfolk were too sharp for him, and they would not let him escape telling them who were going. And if this was so with regard to the theatre, it was much worse in the case of any artists pitching their tents in the town.

There was a famous violinist, a man who played admirably on an instrument of wood and straw; four bell-ringers, brothers; a Moor, who exhibited two wise cows; an English scientist with a microscope; a celebrated Chinese giant, and a sea-calf that said "papa," "mama," etc. Don Mateo had patronized them all, but his canvassing campaigns on their behalf did not prove successful. All the curiosities, Spanish as well as foreign, knew by report our retired colonel, and directly they set foot

in Sarrio they went to call at his house. He went with them to see the mayor, introduced them at the Club, recommended them to the owner of the storehouse where they thought of exhibiting, and he nearly always headed the subscription to pay their journey, and not one of them left the town in former days without being pleased and satisfied; but now they all said their receipts did not pay for the flagstaffs.

Don Mateo's right hand in all these festivities was Severino, of the ironmongery shop. Nobody in the province could equal him in the manufacture of beautiful, elegant, well-arranged decorations, nor in the difficult art of putting up green arches with lamps for the night, nor in his power of sending off rockets swiftly and perpendicularly. Well, this ingenious fellow, who had so delighted the town with his various inventions, had now been idle for some time.

"Severino, we must think of arranging something for the eve of St. Anthony."

"What, Don Mateo, what?" returned the shopkeeper in a depressed tone.

"An illumination of two hundred lamps, an orb, and a few rockets."

"Do you wish us to pay the expense, as we did at the festival of Santa Engracia?"

"Perhaps the West Indians will pay this time," muttered Don Mateo.

"No; don't be so simple; you seem to forget what they are. Pay, indeed! Precious little will they pay!"

Everybody was rather unjust to the West Indians. They simply maintained a strict neutrality, and wondered that worthy men like Belinchon, Miranda, and others should excite themselves so much about things outside their respective occupations and businesses. That handful of calm people in the midst of the fierce contest which waged continually would have been like the chorus of Greek tragedies if only they had not been wanting in any exhibition of either joy or sorrow to either the successes or the reverses of the actors in question. The West Indians of Sarrio were utterly apathetic, dulled by their idle, monotonous life, in which the recollections of their quondam hard work and trials in Cuba sometimes filled them with horror, and added to their sense of comfort at their present circumstances. What did they care for the resolutions carried by the corporation, the attacks made in "The Light" and "The Youth of Sarrio," or the schisms with which the town was continually rent! While they were left quiet to take a turn in the morning on the Mole (and there was no fear of that being disturbed), to play billiards or *tresillo* after dinner, and to take those famous walks in parties in the picturesque suburbs, they did not care for anything. So little interest did

they take that they hardly ever mentioned the episodes of the feud when they were together. The only thing that could disturb them was the telegraphic notification of the rise and fall of the public funds in which their capital was placed.

Otherwise they were model citizens, they gave no offense to anybody, and they only enjoyed what they had worked hard for with their hands. They did not give money to entertainments and performances. But this was not a grave offense, for they saw no necessity for such festivities. What in the world did people want more than to live in a pleasant climate and quietly to eat, work, and sleep the hours away? Besides, they had conferred a benefit on the town by conducting to the altar a number of ladies between the years of twenty-five and thirty, who without this unexpected deliverance would have been left to wither away on the stalk. Now they were almost all stout, quiet matrons, mothers of happy families, and managers of well-ordered houses.

These West Indians were the only people who escaped the incessant attacks of the press, for whatever antipathy was nourished by both parties against them, they did not dare make any public allusion to them, as they had no ground for doing so. They therefore had to content themselves with grumbling and calling them money-laden asses behind their backs.

Thus in the course of three years Sarrio attained the height of perfection that had been the dream of Don Rosendo; that is to say, there was no longer any private life. The deeds of the townsfolk, were they of the most private or the most insignificant character, came to light in the press, and were the subject of censure, comment, and ridicule. Nobody was safe, even in the sanctuary of his home. If rather ugly words passed between a man and his wife, if he chastised his children with more or less severity, if he were short of money, if he were at all dissipated, if he dropped the c's in the middle of words and said *reto* and *pato* instead of *recto* (straight) and *pacto* (agreement), if he ate with his fingers or snored loudly: all these interesting details were recorded for the benefit of the public in "The Light" and "The Youth of Sarrio," sometimes directly, and other times by means of the famous Oriental stories already mentioned.

From the municipal chamber Don Mateo repaired to the Academy, where Señor Anselmo was waiting for him, and it was with great tact that he told him that the band was not to go out that afternoon.

By dint of negotiations and diplomacy he had so far managed to keep it going as well as the Lyceum, although no theatrical performances were now given there, neither was there any dancing, excepting on particular days, such as those of Can-

dlemas, Carnival, and Santa Engracia; but by force of tact and energy Don Mateo had succeeded in making the majority of the members continue their monthly subscription of two pesetas. All the other places of recreation in which the town had been so rich had disappeared. The cause of all the excitement at the present time was the arrival of the Duke of Tornos.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DUKE OF TORNOS APPEARS

THE wide-awake, practical Don Rosendo found out through his agents in Madrid that the Duke of Tornos, Count of Buena Vista, related to the Royal family, former Ambassador in France, head major domo of the palace, etc., a person of much consequence in court and political circles, had decided to spend the summer in Sarrio for the benefit of the sea air, which was considered better for him than that of San Sebastian or Biarritz. When Belinchon heard of it he immediately wrote the duke a letter, placing his house at his disposal.

The duke naturally refused with many graceful expressions of gratitude, but Don Rosendo, who saw the great importance of the triumph of having such a personage under his roof, with whose assistance he counted on routing his adversaries, pressed the matter so much that the duke ended by accepting the invitation.

The Cabin party, having scented the impressive news, made Don Pedro Miranda also offer his house, promising to reimburse him for all the ex-

pense which he would thereby incur. But the duke was already engaged, and so was unable to accede to their request, pressing as it was, which fact filled them with rage, as we shall see. We must mention that the Duke of Tornos belonged to the Moderate party, and although in Sarrio neither the Club nor the Cabin party was very conversant with politics, as the local strifes absorbed all their attention, and their sympathies were always for the party in power, there was no doubt that liberal views prevailed at the Club, beginning with its enterprising chief, while at the Cabin they were more conservative. Therefore the favor conferred on the first was the more trying.

Don Rosendo had had an extra story built to his house the previous year. The birth of another grandchild had induced him to have it done. If the marriage continued to be so fruitful the house would soon be too small for the family. Gonzalo had talked of taking one for himself, as he wanted to be more independent, and to prevent this his father-in-law adopted this plan, and the new floor was built for the young family so that it should be independent. The staircase did not pass through the parents' quarters, although there was a little inner iron stairway, which facilitated communication between the two parts of the house. Gonzalo could enter and leave his dwelling without having

to pass through his father-in-law's house, but they still had their meals together.

But when the Duke of Tornos accepted the invitation it was decided that he was to have the quarters of the young married couple, and they were to return to their old rooms. This was easily managed, for Venturita had furnished her domain with such luxury that it was speedily and easily converted into an abode worthy of the personage who was to be the honored guest. The telegram from his secretary announcing his departure from Madrid was anxiously awaited at the Club, and the faces of all the members glowed with joy and triumph, and shone with the hope that they would soon be able to give some decisive blows to their adversaries, who went about with black, angry looks, although they tried to hide their vexation under a feigned ignorance of the magnitude of the event of the duke's arrival. It was not long before somebody came to tell Belinchon of the mayor's cross-grained conduct about the music. He was at dinner when the news arrived, but with an admirable serenity that his enemies might have envied he finished the plate of soup before him, wiped his mouth, drank a glass of wine, wiped his mouth again, and quietly rose from the table without saying a word.

Like all the great leaders we read of in history, Don Rosendo never lost his dignity, and it was

in critical moments like the present that he was inspired with the grandest ideas and the most helpful resolutions. He went at once to the telegraph office, and wired to the conductor of the orchestra at Lancia to come immediately to Sarrio and he would be well paid.

The conductor replied that they would be there that evening. "All right," he then said to himself; "if the music be not there to receive him, at least he shall have a serenade, and these wretches can rage as much as they like."

The arrival of the Duke of Tornos was, as we have seen, coincident with the fair of St. Anthony. The afternoon was like the morning, bright and clear, without the least heat, for the northeast wind of Sarrio and all Biscayan ports tempers the heat of the summer sun most delightfully. These fairs are frequented by all classes of society, more especially the artisans, so that they have retained their primitive, festive, cheerful character. From early morning numerous groups of girls leave the suburbs and cross the town to take the road to Lancia, clad in the classic black or colored merino skirt, with the flowered cotton handkerchief crossed in front and behind, low shoes, pearl earrings, and smooth, well-brushed, uncovered hair. Their merry talk and bright laughter awaken the quieter townsfolk, still in bed, and make them smile at pleasant recollections of the St. Anthony days of

their youth, when merriment had also shone in their eyes, and no drop of gall had yet fallen into their cup of life. What girl in Sarrio would not recollect some one of these journeyings to the hermitage on a soft, pleasant morning, when the feet seemed winged and the heart beat quickly at the thought of soon seeing and spending the day with the adored swain!

These maidens seemed to emit a waft of brightness which rose from the street to the houses, entered the windows, and invited the inmates to leave for a few hours the heavy weight of business, ambition, envy, and all the low passions which make up the sum of human misery, and follow them in the enjoyment of the fresh morning air, the green fields, the incomparable rich milk sold at the hermitage, in the games of puss in the corner and blind man's buff, in the languid Spanish dances, Morana's sweet caramels and cakes, and, what was better still, the kisses of somebody, when the face was not ugly and the hairs of the *mostacho* not too obtrusive.

Pablito sallied forth in the early morning, accompanied by his faithful Piscis, both mounted on fine spirited horses, which of course pirouetted from side to side. A weighty reason added to his equestrian propensity made him use this mode of transport. Young Belinchon had not frequented any fairs for the past year, and avoided going on

foot. He seldom left the house, especially at night, and only traversed the most frequented streets, and then very rarely alone. He had hidden and bitter enemies. Valentina, the fair, vivacious seamstress, had sworn by all the saints of heaven to plant a dagger in his back.

It is needless to give the reason why. After having ruined her he had abandoned her and gone elsewhere, like a careless, gaudy butterfly which flies from flower to flower. It had cost him some trouble, or rather some alarm. When he heard of his lover's oath, which did not surprise him, as he knew her character so well, he tried to avoid an early, wretched death by sending different emissaries to her with offers of sums of money, her maintenance without work, and suggesting to take and bring up the child. The angry seamstress indignantly rejected all these offers, repeating her horrible, bloodthirsty oath each time an ambassador came to see her.

Naturally our handsome youth felt rather qualmish under the circumstances, and he would have given his carriage and horses to have had eyes at the back of his head. He made the best of those he had, and whenever he went out on foot he exhausted himself in looking about him. But confidence came with time, for as Valentina scarcely ever left home, and never frequented balls and fairs since her trouble, nobody had seen her.

So Pablito, never meeting her on the street, felt emboldened by the suggestion of Piscis to go to the festival of St. Anthony.

Thus they mounted early, and took the wide, dusty Lancian road, shaded for some distance from the town by majestic giant elms. The road inclined, without being very steep, and on both sides was the smiling district of Sarrio, bordered by two or three lines of undulating hills, with the mountains of Narcin in the distance rising above the valley of Lancia still lying in mist.

Looking back after going some distance, the beautiful town was seen bathed in the sunlight, which brightened the white fronts of the houses, while the vast expanse of the sea, touched by the oblique rays of the rising sun, presented a milky-white appearance.

The horses of our equestrians, in the pride of their beautiful breed and their bright, shining backs, caracoled incessantly, which ostentatious display of their muscular power in the morning light raised clouds of dust. The work-girls who were making their way to the hermitage grew impatient, and chaffed the riders more from vexation at the dust than from fear of the horses; and taunts in somewhat bad taste were cast at the severe Piscis, who turned a deaf ear to them, so absorbed was he in the contemplation of the hoofs of the

horses, as their right elevation had been entrusted to his training.

"Bah! the road is too narrow for him!"

"I say, parson, don't kick up such a dust! On horseback you think yourself somebody, but you look like a puppy-dog. You fancy yourself a duke, and you look like a monkey."

They did not interfere with Pablito. The bizarre youth exercised the same fascination over the work-girls as he did over the young ladies. Not only were they attracted by his fine figure, his gallantry and his riches, but also, and perhaps chiefly, by his conquests. The number of adorers he had had in all classes made an aureole of glory round his head. There had been much talk against him among the artisans on account of the affair with Valentina; they called him false, traitor, rogue; but all of them, even the friends of the victim, admired him in secret, and would have required little persuasion to fall into his arms, much as they swore and declared that she had been very foolish to think anything of that flirt.

Pablito pursued his way in a serious mood, also busy with his skittish quadruped. Nevertheless, he occasionally deigned to smile slightly, and this suspicion of a smile so excited the girls that they threw additional fire and wit into their attacks on the invulnerable Piscis.

About two miles on there was a beautiful open green space crossed by the road, which was to be the scene of the festivities in the afternoon, when the people came from the town and the others returned from the hermitage. To go to the hermitage one had to leave the highroad and take the narrow, steep paths bound by little stone walls covered with briers. A mile further on one came on to another open space on the top of the little hill where the shrine stood. The view from thence was beautiful and unequaled. There was an immense expanse of seacoast, not flat, but hilly, planted in some places with maize, in others with corn, and in most places only with grass, and intersected by the long, dusty road of Lancia, with its dark, level line of gigantic elms terminating in the pink and white line of the town.

By the shrine young women from the neighborhood, with more than one satin-cheeked, ruddy-lipped peasant girl, were selling milk in little earthenware mugs. There were also tables covered with cloths spread with *bizcochos* (milk biscuits flavored with cinnamon) and other sugar pastry of ancient renown. The chief feature of the festival was to drink milk in the morning at the hermitage, play with the mugs, and then break them by rolling them down the hill. At twelve o'clock they ate the provisions brought with them, and then repaired to the walnut grove, the usual

scene of the gathering. Pablito did not omit a single item of the program. He bought more than a dozen mugs of milk and a great quantity of biscuits, with which he laid siege to his friends, and then played with them so roughly that they often lost their footing and he fell with them onto the ground, to the great delight of the onlookers. He was most assiduous in his attentions to a very pretty, dark young girl, daughter of Maroto the policeman, who sold fish in the market-place, to whom the reader will recollect Periquito said, in the pit of the theatre, "Ramona, I love you," to the great amusement of Piscis and Pablo.

When the hour came for repairing to the walnut grove he tried to put her upon his horse in front of him. The girl resisted a little, but at last she gave in, for there was no help for it. So the youth arrived with her in the midst of the feast, to the applause and hurrahs of his friends, while the other girls expressed disapproval, and looked scandalized, although they were the first to succumb to the charms of the handsome sultan when they were the objects of his attentions.

By three o'clock the walnut grove was full of visitors. The vast green formed an emerald ground upon which the kerchiefs of the women, white, red, and yellow, in continual motion, formed a movable design in brilliant colors. Fresh arrivals came by the high road from Sarrio, and dis-

persed on the green on both sides. The roar of conversation, like the waves of the sea, was audible a little distance off, and the sharp twang of the guitar could be heard above the dull, monotonous sound and ring of the tambourine. There were some tents with rough plank tables loaded with swollen goatskins of wine, like victims prepared for sacrifice, surrounded by numerous groups of men. Then on the green there was a large crowd of both sexes, in the centre of which the dance of the country was going on to the sound of the castanets and with the motions peculiar to the district.

The dance continued five or six hours without any pause whatsoever. They perspired freely, but they were never fatigued. The men might be so sometimes, the women never. Those who danced so much were country girls from the neighboring villages, who returned home by the cross-roads without passing through the town.

The artisans of Sarrio made up parties for the *giraldilla* (a Moro-Spanish country-dance), in which they sang in loud voices as they opened and closed the lines, leaving in the middle now a group of women, now a group of men. The young gentlemen knowing the girls through the dances at the schools, and accustomed to the pleasure, did not wish to relinquish their right of monopoly in the open air, and so they joined them, although they danced without grace with loose arms and stiff

legs. Then a little further off the artisan lads danced with the girls who were either neglected by the gentlemen or, being of a superior calibre, cast scornful looks in their direction and preferred their own class.

It must not be thought that fashionable dances were omitted that afternoon. Don Mateo having sought for a substitute for the orchestra, had come upon an Italian harpist and violinist, and had paid them to play out of his own pocket. So there, in a corner of the green, under an immense walnut tree, within a rope barrier, were a dozen closely clasped couples giving occasional turns to the measure of the charming national *habanera,* surrounded by a large crowd of spectators.

The young ladies smiled derisively at this rough imitation of their own dances, and felt sorry that such handsome young men should dance with such awkwardness. But when any of the party ventured to ask one for a turn, she, after a little demurring, laughing and blushing, and such like, to show that the act was purely one of condescension, took the arm of the swain and joined in the dance.

Gonzalo came to the feast on foot with Cecilia, the eldest child, and the nurse. And as the road was long and steep, he carried his little girl almost all the way to prevent her getting tired. Ventura hated festivals; besides, her father had taken the

carriage to meet the Duke of Tornos, and to think of going nearly two miles on foot was a monstrous idea. Doña Paula could not go either, for she had been delicate for some time, and the doctors thought that weakness and her want of health were due to a defect of circulation, a cardiacal affection which might turn serious at any time, although not so at present. Cecilia had wanted to release Gonzalo from his burden during the walk, but he had laughingly said:

"You, you little skeleton," for so he called her jokingly; "be quiet, and don't let me have to carry you, too."

And so they arrived like husband and wife, and proceeded to wander over the green, stopping every instant to greet friends they met. They bought sweets for the child, they stood looking at the dancing to the guitar, then they stopped by the *giraldilla*, and finally they went to where the harp and the violin were being played, and there they saw Pablo among the dancing couples, with his arm encircling the form of the beautiful Ramona. Certainly the fantastic youth seemed a little confused when he saw them, and, turning to his sister, he asked:

"Is mama here?"

Cecilia made a negative gesture, and he was reassured.

The child being soon tired of watching the dan-

cing, asked to return to the peasants' dance. So recrossing the highroad, they went back to the gaieties on the other side, which was very fortunate for them, for just at that moment a fearful blood-curdling scene befitting a romantic tragedy was enacted on the spot they had quitted.

Pablito was dancing with his dark young lady, serene in his enjoyment of cutting a good figure. His face, always fresh-looking, was now extremely bright, not so much from physical exercise as from emotional excitement under the sensuous strains of the dance music. Ramona also, as scarlet as a poppy, leaned her chin, embellished with two ravishing dimples, on his shoulder, when she was suddenly horror-struck at the sight of a livid face with two flaming eyes, and Pablito heard a discordant cry behind him:

"Take that, villain!" and at the same time he felt a sharp dig in his back. He turned quickly round, and saw the fury-fraught, distorted face of Valentina, brandishing a weapon in her hand. The youth thought he was mortally wounded and fell to the ground with deathly signs upon his countenance. A crowd of people immediately hastened to raise him, while others caught hold of the seamstress. As he was being carried to a neighboring cottage, Pablito thought he heard the cries of Valentina, who was trying to free herself from her captives, doubtless still anxious to kill him.

The news spread through the place. Many people ran to the scene. Cecilia and Gonzalo, seeing the excitement, asked what it was about; and a friend, who knew the truth, told them that there was only a dispute among the peasants, and so managed to get them away.

In the meanwhile the doctor from a neighboring village, who was there, was asked to go and dress the wound. He was a young man fresh from the lecture hall. The first thing he did was to take off the youth's coat by cutting it down the back, and doing the same with his waistcoat and shirt, and when the flesh was bared he could not help laughing:

"What a wound! There is nothing to be seen."

In fact, the little penknife with which the seamstress had attempted his murder had pierced his coat, his waistcoat, and his shirt; but as to the flesh, it had been left intact. Pablo was greatly relieved to find himself still in the land of the living. Then the woman of the house temporarily stitched up his shirt and he put on the doctor's coat while Piscis went to fetch the horses. Pablo left the house by the back way, and struck across the fields so as not to be seen, for he was not only ashamed of being seen in that dreadful garb, but he was filled with horror at the recollection of the baneful words of Valentina, for if he remembered rightly (and his faint condition had not been conducive to a great

feat of memory), the seamstress had cried, when he was carried away by the four men:

"Get along, brute; and if I have not killed you now, somebody will soon do so."

Pablito was in such deadly fear of being killed by an unknown hand that he would not stay a minute longer at the fair, and when he reached the road, where Piscis was waiting for him, he mounted his horse and lost no time in regaining the town. The sun was sinking. Some of the people began leaving the fair, when there was a great excitement at the sight of six or eight carriages coming along the road from Lancia. It was the Duke of Tornos and his suite. In an open carriage he was seated with his secretary and the great patrician, Don Rosendo. In the next carriage came Don Rufo, Alvaro Peña, and two gentlemen from Lancia; and in the others were Don Rudesindo, Navarro, Don Jeronimo de la Fuente, and several other partizans of the illustrious Belinchon followed in the other vehicles.

On arriving at the walnut grove the duke was astonished at the sight of the motley crowd assembled on the green. He was a man forty-six years of age, with flaccid cheeks of a sickly hue, a drooping lower lip, expressive of boredom and disdain; his cold, glassy, squinting eyes had a vacant expression, and in one of them he had an eyeglass fixed which gave an excessively impertinent look to his

repulsive face. He had no beard, but a long mustache with waxed ends. He dressed in a style never seen in the country; that is to say, with the capricious originality of those who do not follow, but set the fashions. He wore a white American hat with a wide brim. He had a yellow shirt, lilac-colored gloves, and instead of a cravat a white handkerchief tied in the scarf form, with a great pearl pin.

"Delightful! delightful!" he exclaimed at the sight of the picturesque scene, languidly raising his eyelids. His voice was weak, and his enunciation low and labored, as if he were applauding from his box the trills of some prima donna at the Royal Theatre.

Don Rosendo gave him an explanation of the festival; he pointed to the steep hill leading to the shrine, which was visible in the distance; then he directed his attention to the different groups of dancers.

"There, Señor Duke, they are dancing to the strains of the guitar and tambourine; it is the characteristic dance of the country. Over there is the *giraldilla*, in which the town girls dance as they sing. There they drink; those are the tables where sweetmeats are sold. Under that walnut tree they are dancing the *habanera*. See, see, Señor Duke, it is the classic dance of our country—the men on one side, the women on the other; they go on

quietly for hours and hours, singing the old ballads. It is a chaste dance, as you acknowledge."

"Delightful! delightful!" repeated the duke in his drawling tone, directing his eyeglass chiefly at the *giraldilla.* The Duke of Tornos was right. Few more cheerful, beautiful sights could be seen in any other spot on earth.

The feast waxed frenzied at its close. The guitar accentuated its sharp, strident tones, which vibrated in the far distance, accompanied by the persistent, dull sound of the tambourine; the young girls, excited and hot, with their cheeks on fire and their hair in disorder, not only sang, but shouted as they revolved in the *giraldilla*, and waxed desperate at the cessation of the enjoyment so seldom at their command. Those who had been indulging in wine also joined in the cries, with nasal sounds, as they tried to maintain their equilibrium upon the grass. And the lads and lasses of the *danza-prima* (first figure), in increasing excitement, raised the tone of the long, monotonous songs. Even the Italian harpist and violinist dashed into a mazurka, of which the couples showed their appreciation by kicking out wildly on the grass.

Light was leaving the picture, and as it faded a mysterious poetic charm pervaded the scene and reminded one of the happy retreats of old Arcadia.

It seemed as if the people ought to live and die thus in perpetual happiness and youth. Why leave

the spot, why withdraw from that happy retreat to return to the fatigues of daily life, the anxieties and cares of business? To enjoy, in innocence of heart and feeling, health and the sublime harmonies of life and sound; to enjoy the delights of love, the root of all things; to enjoy the force that maintains the cohesion of the universe; to enjoy the plumage of the birds, the murmur of the streams, the scent of the flowers, the dew of the fields, the foam of the sea, the eternal blue of the skies: for this it is to be created a man, not to fill the brief days of one's ephemeral existence with bitter vengeance, pale jealousy, and gnawing depression. The tradition of Paradise is the most ancient and logical of human traditions.

The sun now gilded the tops of the walnut trees which surrounded the green and cast long shadows upon the ground. A slight shudder of cold and melancholy ran through the company, which those who were heated with dancing or wine vainly strove to resist. It soon permeated the whole assembly. Voices were heard of mothers calling to their children, and of brothers to their sisters; groups were formed that waited for a moment to see if their party was complete before starting off. The first to break up was the *giraldilla:* the singing and dancing went on, for as the peasant folk had not so far to go in returning to their homes, they had no fear of nightfall.

The people collected by the carriages in the middle of the road. The duke turned his eyeglass in all directions, looking at the preparations of departure with the eye of a connoisseur in painting. At last, seeing the great crowd assemble from all sides, he gave orders to go on slowly in the wake of the crowd, as he wished to see everything, not because it was beautiful, but because it was new to him.

The carriages then proceeded in the midst of the crowd, surrounded by affectionate couples in intimate converse; old men leading children by one hand and carrying handkerchiefs full of sweetmeats in the other; groups of girls interchanging their experiences in loud voices, with much laughter. As soon as they had gone a little distance from the walnut grove, the canticles, which were the chief features of the festivals of the neighborhood, commenced.

The artisans have good reason to be proud of their voices. They generally sing some sentimental song to a drawn-out, melancholy tune, a harmonious accompaniment being given by the seconds in thirds; at other times, when the party is larger, they use the traditional street ditties, which are various and delightful. That they did on this occasion. The duke was surprised at hearing the chorus of fresh voices incessantly repeating simple couplets like the following:

"I was high above
In the tower of love;
The foundations rumbled,
But I never tumbled.

"Why should the poor
Call at your door,
When your palm never itches
To give of your riches?"

But the puerile ideas of the lines acquired in their mouths an undue importance. They seemed solemn phrases, mysterious and wondrous formulas that no outsider could enter into without sacrilege. The air seemed filled with those sweet, drawn-out sounds; an indescribable feeling pervaded the singers from whose mouths they fell; each time they repeated them with more tenderness, with more unction, as they colored them with those poetic sentiments which always fill their hearts, and are transmitted from mothers to daughters in the romantic Biscayan town. It was the melancholy of those who apprehend the world of beauty, love it, and are forced by circumstances to live and die far from it. Between the couplets there was a silent pause, filled with the tramp of feet. The choir seemed to be in a waking dream, only alive to the vague feelings which the song aroused in the depths of their hearts.

Night fell suddenly. The branches of the high elms stood out clearly in the diaphanous atmos-

phere, but the shadows cast upon the road became darker. The landscape had lost its color, and the bluish hue of the tracts planted with corn were hardly distinguishable in the shades of evening. The great sweep of the ocean in the distance was now indistinct. The brilliant blue of midday had changed into a metallic greenish gray. The choir soon shook off its melancholy. A young girl started a bright, merry air, and the others willingly joined in, as if glad to awake from a sad dream:

"Do not bewail
That you must fail
To go to Anthony Fair,
There to tread on air;
For lo! it is raining,
And you'll be complaining
That no more you will get
The dress now so wet."

This was sung with the eager shout of enthusiasm usual with such songs, and a few minutes after its conclusion an improvised couplet, illustrating the present situation, followed:

"Come to St. Anthony Fair;
There you will stare;
A duke to see
As polite as can be.
The girls laughed and ran
To see such a great man."

And thenceforth the magnate was introduced into the songs; and he, turning his eyeglass from

right to left, and shaking his head with a benevolent smile, repeated in a low voice:

"Delightful! delightful! A Teniers picture! a Lorena's landscape!"

By the time they reached the town night had closed in. The duke with his secretary withdrew to the rooms prepared for him by Don Rosendo. The secretary was a young man of six-and-twenty, pale, and red-haired, whose undeveloped brain contained no idea beyond that of the colossal importance of the duke, and the imperious necessity of becoming a personage, if not of so much consequence, yet important enough to also have a secretary. Beyond these ideas the world had no other meaning for Cosio, for such was his name.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHAT HAPPENED AT DINNER

THE magnate came down to dinner in the orthodox evening dress. Cosio did the same. Don Rosendo had changed the Spanish hour of dinner for the French. Seeing him enter in evening dress, the Belinchon family were much upset. It was evident that Belinchon, his son, and his son-in-law had made a mistake in not dressing. Venturita mentioned the fact in a cross, low tone to her husband, but he only shrugged his shoulders and moved his lips in a scornful way. He was out of temper, for when asking his wife why the table had been laid without a place for the child, she had rudely said:

"But, Gonzalo, don't be silly! Do you want the child to dine to-day with us?"

"Why not?"

Venturita was shocked, and then she laughingly asked him if he had learned those fashions in the regatta clubs in England. This had so put him out that he did not feel inclined to show the duke the respect and deference due to him. His wife, on

the contrary, had been busy for days preparing for the reception of the illustrious visitor.

The staff of servants had been increased at her suggestion and under her directions, and the men-servants were put into livery.

When Gonzalo saw Pachin, an old retainer, in his uniform, he burst out laughing, which greatly excited the ire of his wife. She also instituted a new, aristocratic arrangement of Belinchon's table, with the introduction of dessert knives and forks, fish knives, and lithographed cards for the menu, besides other innovations hitherto unknown at the meals of the house. The foreign element also modified the healthy, patriarchal, abundant fare which we saw at the beginning of this story.

Ventura appeared in the drawing-room with a low-necked blue silk dress and bare arms. She had learned, we know not where, that at formal dinners ladies should wear low-necked gowns. Doña Paula did not go so far as that, but she was gorgeously dressed in bright-colored materials that formed a sad contrast to her thin face, wasted by illness. The only guests were Alvaro Peña and Don Rufo. Pachin, the good Pachin, in his new livery, opened the door and said, with a sonorous voice, in which he had been drilled by Ventura:

"Dinner is served!"

The duke offered his arm to Doña Paula, and they all repaired to the dining-room. The hostess

took the chief place, in accordance with her daughter's previous injunction. The duke sat at her right hand, Don Rufo at her left, and the others took their seats as they liked. Venturita had her place set at the right hand of the distinguished guest, then came Alvaro Peña, Cosio, Pablito, and Don Rosendo, while Gonzalo sat by the side of Cecilia.

Then the dinner began with stiff ceremony and long intervals of silence. They were all oppressed and overwhelmed with the grandeur of the guest. The thin hair on the back and the side of the duke's shiny bald head was still black in spite of his forty-six years. His slightest movements were the object of the company's admiring attention, and his remarks were received by the company with smiles of delight and adulation.

The first words that fell from his lips after a few conventional courtesies expressed his admiration of the suburbs of the town.

"I only know the provinces in the north," he said in a slow, drawling tone. "I find this much superior to that in the way of scenery; it offers more variety, richer coloring, and there are lovely spots in the district we have traversed, comparable to the most enchanting scenes in Switzerland. Then on arriving at the coast there is the same softness of outline, the same sweetness of atmosphere as in the south of Italy."

"Oh, Señor Duke, you are too flattering! Pure kindness, Señor Duke. In the summer this country is all very well, but in winter!"

Don Rosendo, Alvaro Peña, and Don Rufo, overwhelmed with joy and gratitude, blushed, and disclaimed the encomiums as if they had been the objects of them. The duke continued speaking, as if he had not heard their exclamations.

"It is more hilly than the northern provinces, the tones are more marked. I saw from the Lancian road, looking eastward, a group of mountains with the summits still covered with snow, which was truly beautiful. It only wants a few lakes, and foreigners would resort to it."

"We have a lake in the west of the province," said Peña.

"A lake?" queried the duke, as he raised his eyelids to look at the interlocutor.

"Yes, señor; the lake is called Nordon."

Then the duke kept his glassy gaze fixed upon the officer until he grew confused, and after bringing each person at the table into the focus of that gaze, he continued:

"In my gallery at Bourges I have a landscape, by Backhuysen, with a background very similar to that of these mountains. Only in the foreground there is a lake surrounded with briers. On the right there are some swans swimming on the water, and on the left there is a boat with two young

peasants. I bought it merely for the delicacy of the coloring."

"The señor duke seems to like good pictures," said Don Rufo, stretching his mouth from ear to ear to speak with a befitting smile.

"And who does not like them?" returned the magnate, looking at him with his squinting eyes.

"Oh, yes, señor—it is true—you are very right! Everybody likes them. But it is an expensive taste —only great people like the señor duke can allow themselves the luxury."

Don Rufo here became confused, thinking he had said something disrespectful.

"The señor duke has many pictures of the best painters from what I hear," said Don Rosendo, coming to his friend's assistance.

"I have a few," returned the nobleman, pouring some water into Venturita's glass. This act overwhelmed the girl with gratitude, and the blood rushed to her face.

"The duke's is one of the first galleries in Europe," said Cosio in a low voice to Peña.

"I like painting because it is the national art," continued the magnate. "It is the only one in which we have really advanced; it is the only one in which we distinguish ourselves in the present day—because, although I have spent a great deal of my life abroad, I am very fond of my country," he added in a patronizing tone, with a slight smile.

If the country could have heard those fine words it would doubtless, like Venturita, have trembled for joy.

"I love it notwithstanding I acknowledge its backward condition. Nature has endowed us liberally with rich gifts. A fertile country—not so much so as is commonly believed, but, in short, fertile—admirably situated at one side of Europe, stretching her hand to America across the seas; a sky—oh, the sky! There is not another like it. The air has here, above all in the south, a transparency—oh, an infinite transparency! The despair of painters. Then this transparency gives greater purity to the outlines; nowhere do points stand out as they do here. In Castile the towers are visible many miles off, and as distinct as if they were only a few steps distant. It is quite evident this is due to its being above the level of the sea."

"The countries which lie much higher than the level of the sea are the least intelligent," remarked Don Rufo, glad to air his physiological mania.

The duke turned his head to look at the speaker, and then went on as if he had not heard him.

"Then the great power of the sun throws up the contrast between the light and the shade, and gives a distinct outline even to the distant mountains. Only here in the north the vapors floating in the atmosphere rather blur and confuse the contours, and make them misty. But, on the other hand, the

tones are richer; in the south the shades of the ground are lost in the excessive brilliance of the sky, in the universal sense of light. But here what an immense variety of shades! Oh, infinite beauty! Then what power, what changes! In the south the tone is stationary; the immutable light of the sky keeps it the same for many hours, and the same one day as another; but in these provinces, where the light changes every minute, the color varies, too; the composition is perfect, the gradations of color are slight, and its general tone is transformed into strong reliefs."

The duke, having begun enumerating the advantages possessed by the Spaniards, could not leave the subject of contour, light, and color, and lost himself in disquisitions on landscape, to which the company listened without understanding, with open eyes and idly moving lips.

But without ceasing talking he attended to Venturita, anticipating her wishes, pouring water into her glass, handing her the condiments, the bread, or anything she might want, signing to the servant to give her wine when he noticed that her glasses were empty, and all with the easy, polished ways of a man accustomed to society. Venturita accepted these attentions shyly and smilingly, and trembling with gratitude, without understanding that at that moment she was nothing to the magnate but the lady on his right.

Gonzalo, not feeling well disposed to the egregious guest, became tired of the monologue on painting, and exchanged a few whispered remarks with his sister-in-law, joking her as usual on her small appetite.

"Come, bag of bones, another cutlet. Don't be ashamed because the señor is here. We told you that he will not be astonished at the quantity you eat. Constitutions like yours require a little fat."

Cecilia, smiling, replied with broken words, with respectful glances at the duke; and he, having noticed that they had spoken, raised his eyes and gave them a vacant, contemptuous look. The second time, particularly as Gonzalo and Cecilia put their table-napkins to their mouths to stop the sound of their laughing, the glance of the nobleman was longer, colder, and more abstracted than ever. Venturita showed her annoyance with her eyes, but Gonzalo, either from a wish to avenge his wife's former slighting remarks, or because he really did not feel the shyness and awe with which the personage inspired the others, did not desist from joking with his sister-in-law and making her laugh.

The affectionate feeling between the brother and sister-in-law had not decreased. Gonzalo and his children were the especial care of Cecilia. Her beneficial, sweet influence was felt every moment of their lives. The eldest little girl, Cecilita, now

two years and a half old, and the other, Paulina, who was eight months old, throve under their aunt's maternal warmth of affection: she washed them, she dressed them, she took them out to walk, she was the first to teach them to pray. The mother, fond as she was of her children, soon wearied of them; their crying worried her; and when it was a question of keeping them quiet she was ignorant of any method of doing so, and only ended by half suffocating them with caresses.

Thus it came about that "auntie" was the refuge to which they ran, and for which they cried in any distress. Sometimes Ventura, wounded at this preference, grew jealous, and made them stay with her by force, but this only resulted in making them afraid of her.

As to Gonzalo, he had in Cecilia a sister and a mother, ever ready to save him discomfort and to remove all thorns from his path; she always had a soothing effect upon him, and he would go to her like a great spoiled child, annoyed if his wishes were not immediately complied with, and not sparing her in any way.

But the bond between him and his wife remained firm and unchanged; his passionate admiration, which had made him commit the first sin of his life, had not abated in spite of everything; she was still the orbit of his life. Ventura kept her hold over him by the power of her beauty, which continued to

fascinate his senses. Cecilia understood it all, and when the young man, wounded by some neglect or some unkind word of his wife, broke out in complaints against her, she smiled sadly, and tried to calm him, while she was sure that her brother-in-law would soon lower himself by going to his wife in contrition and shame to kiss her very feet.

When the nobleman had finished his monologue a few minutes' silence ensued. Then, as if recollecting he had been remiss, he assumed a benevolent interest in his companions' affairs.

"So Señor Don Rufo Pedroso is a doctor, eh? The practise of medicine is arduous, especially in the provinces where, as a general rule, it does not meet with due compensation. Señor Peña is a sailor, is he not? Oh, the naval profession has always been brilliant. It is a pity that our war material is not equal to the bravery and skill of the officers. They have a hard time of it. Does the command of a harbor give much to do? I thought of bringing before the Senate a motion asking for the construction of two ironclads. And Pablito, does he have a good time in Sarrio? What resources does the town offer to young men?" Had he been in Madrid? He was fond of horses. Ah, riding was a grand exercise! The duke could well sympathize with that taste. Were his horses Spanish or foreign? He asked all these questions in an abstracted way, with an artificial smile, as if he

were reciting a lesson. In fact, the most trying point of his code of manners was the necessity of recollecting that one has to make one's self agreeable to people with whom one is conversing, and to take an interest in their affairs.

He cast a cold glance at Gonzalo and Cecilia, but he directed no questions to them. When the unpleasant task of conventionality was accomplished the magnate resumed his eternal monologue. This time it was not on painting, but on archeology. In Lancia he had seen a Byzantine chapel, which had excited his attention by its purity, not having at present been at all restored. The cathedral was not bad, only the tower was too wide; evidently it was originally higher, but its dimensions had doubtless been changed when rebuilt after its destruction by lightning. He understood that Sarrio had a very beautiful church in the florid style of architecture. While the duke continued this drawling, learned, endless disquisition, Don Rosendo evinced by his eyes and gestures that he was consumed with an anxiety which he vainly strove to conceal. Three times he had asked a question of the servant in a low voice, and three times he had received the answer also in a low voice.

The duke having concluded his archeological monologue, with the perspicacity of the conceited, who know whom they fascinate and whom they do

not, then addressed his conversation to Venturita. The remarks were now made with a little more animation, and the illustrious guest occasionally deigned to smile, and to do his fair interlocutor the honor of raising his drooping eyelids to give her a look of curiosity and admiration. The girl was filled with pride at this mark of favor, and with crimson cheeks and bright eyes she talked so naively and prettily that the duke was quite delighted with her. They seemed to be talking of painting, for Cecilia and Gonzalo, who were still joking together, heard her say:

"Oh, Rubens! What flesh-painting! Rubens is the Cervantes of painting."

Gonzalo turned his head as if he had been struck, while his face expressed his astonishment.

"Cecilia, where did my wife learn all that?" he asked his sister-in-law.

A shrug of the shoulders was the only reply. But Venturita had noticed Gonzalo's movement, his surprise, and the remark he made to Cecilia. She colored, and lowered her voice; then seeing her husband's mocking expression, returned it with a quick, angry look.

In the meanwhile Doña Paula talked to Don Rufo about her heart complaint; Cosio took pride in describing to Peña and Pablito all the grandeur and luxury of the Castle of Bourges, where the duke had his famous picture gallery. Only Don

Rosendo remained silent, getting more restless every minute, and making little balls of bread with his nervous fingers. Suddenly his fine features expanded into a benevolent smile, for all heads were simultaneously raised at the sound of a loud trumpet in the street—it was the band from Lancia, arrived at last.

CHAPTER XXV

THE DUKE'S DIVERSIONS

"THE LIGHT" the following Thursday was almost entirely devoted to panegyrics on the Duke of Tornos: the first part gave his biography, the second a description of his arrival at the fair, and the romantic way he was accompanied to the town by its most beautiful maidens to the sound of triumphal song and music; then reference was made to this event in the verses by one of Don Rufo's sons; and finally there figured in the third part of the paper two or three striking paragraphs about the illustrious arrival. "The Youth of Sarrio," on the contrary, only noticed his arrival in a short, cold article called "Welcome." But the opportunity was taken to deal a spiteful double-edged thrust at its enemies. The article described Don Rosendo taking the duke to the Club and introducing him to its chief members, and this gave the ground for great fun to be made of Don Rudesindo, Don Feliciano Gomez, Alvaro Peña, Don Rufo, and other worthy persons. The account excited great indignation among all Belinchon's

friends, and fired their hearts with revengeful feelings, and its well-turned spiteful phrases caused it to be universally attributed to Sinforoso Suarez.

What? Was not Sinforoso the chief editor of "The Light," the faithful friend and follower of Don Rosendo? No; not now. He left his old friends about a year ago and went over to the enemy's side, which, trading on his weak disposition and the ruling passion of his soul, put the screws on, and, seconded by his father and others, told him that there would be no career open to him as long as he belonged to the Club party, for in attacking the religious ideas of the place he shut himself out from all respectable houses and all conquests of the fairer sex, and he was bribed with the vague prospect of a brilliant marriage with one of Maza's daughters. So finally, to the surprise and astonishment of the town, he deserted his friends and patrons, and in the space of twenty-four hours he exchanged the editorship of "The Light" for a place on the staff of "The Youth of Sarrio."

This act, however, was not done with impunity, for when Alvaro Peña met him the next time in the Rua Nueva at midday, he loaded him with imprecations, and, what was worse, his fist left marks on his face. The punishment was so humiliating that Sinforoso, who was lacking in neither pride

nor bravery, was filled with a burning desire for vengeance against his fierce assailant. Arming himself with a bar of iron provided by his new friends, he lay in wait for the officer at the corner of the Calle of San Florencio, and gave him from behind a blow on the head which felled him senseless to the ground. Peña was then carried to his house, where he had to remain eight days in bed. His friends were powerless to persuade him to place the matter in the hands of the law; for being an irascible, impetuous man, he thought that legal proceedings would be too temperate for him. It was reported that the officer, when looking at the walls of the cemetery from his window, was heard to say in decided tones:

"Poor Sinforoso! It won't be many days before he takes his permanent place there."

These prophetic words caused a great sensation in the town, for the speaker was supposed to be imbued with the power of fulfilling them. The effect that they had on Sinforoso is indescribable. As soon as the officer had sufficiently recovered from his wound to reappear in the street, Perinolo's son made himself scarce; he was not seen for quite a month. It was said that he only went out at night, and then with many precautions. But as everything must come to an end, the young man gradually relaxed his precautionary measures, as he thought that time must have tempered the mur-

derous intents of Peña. He gradually grew accustomed to the danger, and ventured to go out in the daytime; but he avoided the spots where he might meet his enemy by asking people he met if they had seen him go by, and in what direction had he gone. The town, therefore, was in a state of great excitement, as it daily expected that a catastrophe would ensue.

On a certain afternoon, hearing that Peña had gone to the mouth of the river with Don Rosendo, our Sinforoso ventured to enter the Café Marina and call for a bottle of beer.

Having taken a seat at one of the tables nearest the door, he noticed that many of his friends and acquaintances exchanged smiles and knowing glances; and before many minutes had passed the stentorian voice of the officer fell upon his ear, for he was carrying on a discussion with his friends in a dark corner of the café. This sound made our journalist throw himself on all fours, and, gaining the door in this ignominious position, he quickly took to his heels.

When he was supposed to be well out of reach, one of the party said:

"Alvaro, do you know who was here just now?"

"Who?"

"Sinforoso; he has only just gone."

"Ah! bad luck to him!" exclaimed Peña, rushing more than running past the tables, and leaving

the place in a whirlwind. But where was Sinforoso? After flying a good way down the street without knowing whither, the officer was obliged to return to the café, mad with anger and rage. Nevertheless, so much time elapsed without his coming across his assailant that his anger cooled down, and when three months later he met him at the end of the pier he contented himself with the administration of a couple of kicks, and the son of Perinolo thanked his stars for getting off so easily. The indignation aroused by the upstart journal was tempered with the hope of annihilating "the reptiles" who had started it, or at least humiliating them with the reported grandeur of the duke. During the days succeeding the arrival of the grandee, Belinchon's friends cast mocking glances at their rivals.

"Tremble, pettifoggers, tremble," their glances seemed to say. Even Don Rosendo, so magnanimous, so philosophical, so humane, shared their implacable rage and longed to exterminate his rivals.

The combative spirit which had taken possession of him gradually gained ground, so much so that all his high-minded desire for progress and his interest in the moral and material evolution of his natal town were swallowed up in his burning desire to injure his enemies. This, however, was only an incidental state of affairs. The depths of

his soul remained as pure and as progressive as when it left the hands of its Creator.

The Club party formed an impassable barrier around the duke, and according to the expression of "The Youth of Sarrio," it "sequestered" him.

He never went into the street without being accompanied by four or six of the most important members. Opportunities of approaching him nearer were only afforded to such of the townsfolk as were considered worthy of the honor, for parties and dances were given in the town and in the suburbs, and Belinchon's friends were not remiss in arranging picnics and fishing and hunting expeditions.

Really, life was pleasant in Sarrio in summertime. The duke, whose coming had been heralded by the arrival of a quantity of luggage, was supplied with all necessary materials for painting, and, profiting by the leisure hours at his command, he produced pictures full of marvelous inspiration. His intercourse with the Belinchon family was of a stiff and courteous character, perfectly befitting the maintenance of a requisite distance. His words and his manners were always touched with an assumed protecting air, which somewhat softened the look of boredom on his face when in repose.

It was only with Venturita that his dull eyes seemed to brighten a little, and with her the duke's attention even increased to the point of a free-and-

easy gallantry. When chatting in the family circle his glance was always turned in her direction, as if she were the only one capable of understanding him. Gonzalo's wife was the first allowed to see the creations of his brush, and her admiration was the only person's he valued; he gave her some French novels to read, and the discussions on the subjects and authors of these works formed topics of conversation between them at table, to which the others listened without understanding. After some days the duke suggested painting Venturita's portrait. He said that landscape was his chief taste, he had painted portraits only of the Duchesse de Montmorency and of one of the infantas of Spain; but now he had a great fancy to paint Venturita just as he had seen her for the first time in the low-necked blue dress. The young girl felt immensely flattered: the first portrait a duchess, the second an infanta, the third herself! Then that particular wish of painting her in the dress worn the first evening! No doubt she had made a great impression upon the duke. The sittings were started in one of the rooms on the ground floor. Don Jaime, as the grandee was called, decided to paint her reclining on a crimson sofa, with plants and flowers at her side. Doña Paula, Gonzalo, and Cecilia were present at the first sitting, but they soon wearied of being there, and during the subsequent sittings they were alone, the mother

only occasionally coming in to give a glance at the picture and to say a few polite words.

During the fortnight that the painting of the portrait lasted, the intimacy between the duke and the beauty made great strides. The grandee even condescended to tell her a great deal of his private history; his public one was known by everybody. Don Jaime de la Nava and Sandoval married, when very young, a grand lady united by ties of blood to the sovereign. The marriage did not prove happy. The passionate love of the lady, which had led her to overstep the social barrier which separated her from her husband, soon cooled down; differences arose, a scandal took place, and a separation ensued. Although Don Jaime descanted on the privileges and honors of his elevated position, he did not make it all roseate, for no, he was a victim to fate, and only custom made him callous to the sufferings to which he was a prey. He had not had time to recover from the shock of his wife's treatment, but he found some consolation in making bitter attacks upon the aristocracy of Madrid, and the highest people of the land were not exempted from the venom of his remarks. Venturita had thus an opportunity of gaining an insight into the character of the magnate, and as the duke grew more at home with her he took the measure of the girl's character. He would turn the conversation to other topics, as if he felt it

was not good form to pursue depressing subjects; and he talked with perfect naturalness of the immoral conduct of high-born ladies in Madrid as if it were a matter of daily occurrence. The Duquesa de So-and-So is now with a certain banker's son; the Marquesa de So-and-So has gone off to Brussels with the son of the Russian ambassador; this lady takes up with toreadors, that one with her groom; the Condesa de So-and-So is proud of having three lovers at a time; the Baronesa de So-and-So had hers in the carriage with her, while her husband drove on the box.

In fact, there was not a lady of the court at whom he did not cast some aspersion, not excepting his wife herself. Once he concluded his discourse by saying: "And finally, if you want to know what the aristocracy of Madrid is like, you have only to take the Duchess de Tornos, who is a conglomeration of all its vices."

Ventura was amazed. She had a vague idea of the duke's bad feeling toward the duchess, but she had not thought it possible that a husband could speak like that of his wife under any circumstances.

Nevertheless, she was so fascinated by the importance of the grandee that she soon began to think that his cynicism and style of conversation were only according to fashion and "good form."

Then spicy anecdotes followed of a most questionable character, but they were told in the soft,

low voice of the duke, and his lips were wreathed with a smile of superiority as he said:

"One can tell you these things, as you are married."

It was thus that the young girl gained a panoramic view of the court world, which she had been so anxious to know. The private life of those pallid youths with waxed *mostachos* she had seen driving smart vehicles in the Castellana, and of those beautiful, proud ladies rolling by in their carriages, scarcely deigning to cast a careless, scornful glance at her, now passed before her mind's eye. While only affecting a polite attention to these details of the world, she was in reality drinking them in with feverish eagerness, for she had always a nascent desire for brilliant society, extravagant fancies, and unattainable ambitions.

Thus the Duke de Tornos, inadvertently, and for the mere pleasure of indulging his bored, wounded state of mind, did more for the corruption of the young wife's soul in a few days than could have been done by a whole course of novels.

Because, after all, what the novels say is not true; but the stories of the duke had only recently taken place, and the people who had played a part in them were really living persons known by their world; in fact, to use a common expression, it was real life.

The grandee with his corrupt mind and worn-out body, and the beautiful country girl anxious to fly to other spheres, doubtless both thought they had been born to understand each other and to be drawn together like certain forces in natural science. Venturita centred all her powers of fascination upon the painter, and she became more engaging every day. When the duke, raising his eyelids to look at her, evinced any sign of admiration, her delight suffused her cheeks with crimson, and she was filled with the deepest scorn for the state of life in which fate had cast her lot.

Although she did not presume upon the friendliness of the grandee, she ventured to joke with him a little occasionally, to the great distress of Don Rosendo; in fact, she knew she was the favorite, and so she assumed a coquettish manner in his company. The duke meanwhile, in spite of his assumed indifference for all things in heaven or earth, devoted an immense deal of attention to his coat, shirts, ties, and, in short, all that constitutes man's attire; and the variety, originality, and eccentricity of the costumes in which he appeared were a revelation to Venturita and a source of wonder to the town. In fact, if she dressed herself for the duke, he did so no less for her.

It gradually dawned upon Don Rosendo's younger daughter that the friendship of the duke might be turned to account by augmenting

her father's political influence in the town, as well as by adding lustre and dignity to the family.

For instance, he might have a large cross.

Those who had one were addressed as "excellency." If her father were an excellency he would lose the stamp of a codfish merchant, which was an offense to her. And why should it not come to pass? A person of such influence as the duke could easily manage it. She had heard that a title of count or marquis could be bought. A title! And Venturita, without thinking of her elder brother and sister, lost herself in pleasant thoughts of one day being addressed as "la señora marquesa," or "la señora condesa."

But then that husband of hers was such a "boor"! So averse to interfering with politics or asserting himself at all. Oh! if she were but a man, what would she not do!

In a short time her friendship and influence with the duke increased to such a degree that it was noticed not only by the inmates of the house, but also by outsiders. Don Jaime even went to meet her when coming from bathing, and walked back with her right across the town, to the great excitement of the people. The girl nearly died with pleasure at the thought of the envy of her friends at this mark of favor, for the duke openly paid her a thousand attentions, and made no secret of admiring her more than the other members of the

family. Gonzalo was secretly very much annoyed at this friendliness. He had disliked the duke from the first, and he noticed that the antipathy was mutual, although, as a man of the world, the duke had assumed a courteous, almost kind demeanor, which would have disguised his feelings to any but a very keen observer, or a simple-hearted fellow like Gonzalo. Nevertheless, with his increased friendliness and ease with the wife there was a decrease of animosity toward the husband, and his politeness seemed to be of a sincere character. Knowing that Gonzalo was devoted to sport, he made him a present of a magnificent gun which had been given him by the Czar of Russia. Then the grandee frequently invited him to join him in shooting expeditions, so that their relations became less strained. But unfortunately an accident occurred which upset them again.

One day, Gonzalo having gone to Lancia on business for his father-in-law, the duke went off coursing, only accompanied by Don Feliciano and Don Sanjurjo, the notary; the dogs he took with him belonged to the house. Then it happened that the harrier Gonzalo thought most of, having bought him for a high price in England, misbehaved himself. The fault that he committed was one of the gravest that can be committed in the exercise of his duty; it was nothing less than dropping a hare when the duke ran forward to take it

from his mouth, so that the timid creature, only wounded in one leg, escaped into the bracken. Thereupon the rage of the grandee was so great that, raising his gun, he fired upon the dog, but the animal, seeing the aggressive attitude of the sportsman, ran away and got off scot-free.

The duke, in a fury, pursued the animal to put an end to it, but he could not overtake it. The culprit fled from the scene, and was invisible for the rest of the day. When the grandee reached home he was told that the dog had returned, and then Don Jaime, who was still in a rage, said to the servant:

"Catch that dog, take him out of the town, and shoot him."

The man-servant was thunderstruck. He stood for some minutes in doubt, and then, cowed by the stern, imperious look of the duke, he bowed submissively and proceeded to execute the order.

He called the dog, put a chain on him, and taking his gun he left the house. How little the poor creature thought he was going to his death! He leaped for joy; he wriggled with delight, and lavished such licks of affection on the servant's face that the man's eyes filled with tears, and he cursed the course of action to which he was compelled, for the beautiful dog was a great favorite of his.

"Heaven's mercy on us! What should he say to

Señor Gonzalo when he heard that his Polion had been killed?"

Just as he was thinking this, Gonzalo appeared round the corner of the street. He had arrived in the coach from Lancia, and was on his way home. Seeing the servant, he said with some surprise:

"Where are you off to, Ramon?"

The servant, abashed and frightened, hesitated a few seconds, and then said:

"To kill the dog."

This reply so astonished the young man that he was dumb with amazement.

"Kill the dog!"

"Yes, señor; the duke gave me the order because he dropped the hare after catching it."

Gonzalo turned livid.

"How dare he give such a shameless order!" roared the young man, and snatching the chain so roughly from the servant that he made him stagger.

Then he strode toward the house, accompanied by the dog, with the intention of having a violent scene with the duke. But before he reached home he had time to consider that it would be a breach of hospitality to quarrel with a guest, and so he contented himself with sending Polion back to the kennel, and treating the duke somewhat coldly.

CHAPTER XXVI

STORY OF A MANDARIN

AFTER the canine episode the preference shown by the duke for his wife, and the attentions that he paid her, became as offensive to Gonzalo as they were at first astonishing, although it still never entered his head that they went beyond the politeness or gallantry customary in high society. Besides, the disparity of age between the duke and his wife seemed to preclude all thoughts of jealousy. Such things only happened in novels. One day, when he was alone with Cecilia, he suddenly broached the subject by saying:

"Cecilia, what do you think of the friendship of my wife with the duke?"

The girl looked surprised.

"What do I think of it?" she returned, looking at him with her large, liquid eyes. "Why, I think that Ventura gets on with him better than the rest of us here."

"But this partiality, don't you think it makes me look rather ridiculous?"

"Why?"

"Why, because it does," was the abrupt reply.

Then after a few minutes' silence he added:

"You, Cecilia, do not know how easily a husband can be made ridiculous when he has such a frivolous, imprudent wife as Ventura!"

"Gonzalo!"

"So imprudent, yes; for you don't notice how pleased she is to talk aside with him, and how delighted she is when everybody sees her hanging on his arm! There is no need to say anything, for I know it is sheer vanity. She has never been anything but vain and frivolous. You know it yourself, although you won't confess it. But in this case her vanity may give rise to many grave consequences for me and for everybody. Let her put on a different dress every day to attract the duke; let her cut her nails into points, and let her put rouge on her cheeks; let her talk of Meissonier's pictures without having seen them, and play the fool in other similar ways; but, my dear girl, those smiles before people and those asides are intolerable, and if they go on many more days I think I shall have to put matters right in a way she won't like."

Cecilia tried to calm him down. If he himself confessed that it was all due to Venturita's frivolous nature, why should he excite himself about it? Jealousy was ridiculous; nobody in the world could suppose that Venturita regarded the

duke as anything else than what he was—a married man, and an old one who might very well be her grandfather.

"No, I am not jealous," said the young man somewhat shamefacedly.

"Yes, you are, Gonzalo, although you don't know that you are. This anger and this excitement, what do they show but jealousy? And look here, my boy; allow me to say that it is not paying much compliment to yourself, and still less to your wife, for if you can imagine that Ventura can prefer this worn-out man to yourself, you credit her with very little taste."

She blushed as she said these words, and Gonzalo received the sally with a smile without being convinced. His instinct, which was stronger than his intelligence, told him that such an aberration was possible. However, he did not wish to pursue the discussion, because it was humiliating to press the point, even with his sister-in-law.

He wanted to tell his wife that he strongly objected to the conversations, confidences, glances, and coquettish smiles she lavished upon the duke, but he knew Venturita of old, and dreaded speaking to her himself. One of the biting remarks in which she excelled, or a mocking retort, easily upset him, and when he was upset like that he did not know where he was and where to stop.

This was the position of affairs when, the day

following his conversation with Cecilia, he looked in at the Club as usual. Glancing at the papers on the centre table, his eye fell upon the last number of "The Youth of Sarrio." He hardly ever read the paper, for although he was not a party to the antagonistic attitude of his fellow-members, he was equally averse to the course taken by the Cabin community, and he avoided seeing the insults leveled at his father-in-law, that made his blood boil. But on this occasion he cast a careless glance at it, and stopped to read some of Periquito's verses on the charms of a certain lady, which made him roar with laughter. Under this effusion there was a short story with the heading, "*An Uncommon Kind of Husband*," and he began to peruse it in a perfunctory way:

"A mandarin on his travels was received as the guest of a certain Chinese plebeian, who placed the best room at his disposal and provided the best provisions the market could supply in his honor. This Chinaman had a very beautiful wife who at once attracted the attention of the old mandarin (for he was old). The mandarin took no heed of the comforts and the luxurious furniture which the Chinese proudly placed at his disposal; he had only eyes for the wife of the Chinaman. The house was frequented by all the friends of the host, who were obsequiously effusive in smiles, flattery, and genuflections. But the mandarin hardly condescended

to notice them; he had no words for anybody but the wife of the Chinaman. He was taken to see the town, the chief points of interest, the picturesque suburbs; it all fell flat: the mandarin was absorbed in the lady. He was taken to large shooting parties, he was rowed out on the still blue sea in a beautiful boat, to try his hand at fishing. But as the mandarin cast his net into the deep he thought he would rather ensnare his host's lovely wife.

"And while the whole house and neighborhood were alive to the cause of the mandarin's depression and saw the drift of his attentions, the husband was quite unsuspicious and calm, and continued to entertain the mandarin with magnificent banquets and splendid festivities until a friend whispered in his ear one day: 'Don't you see, silly, that your guest cares nothing for your entertainments and fishing and shooting parties? His heart is set upon your beautiful wife.'

"Then the Chinaman, when his eyes were opened, took his wife by the hand and led her to the mandarin, saying:

" 'Pardon, my lord, but I did not notice your depression, nor did I guess your wishes. If I had guessed them sooner I would have gratified them ere now. Here, take my wife, oh glorious mandarin.' "

Gonzalo read the columns without seeing the

drift of their meaning, but suddenly it burst upon him, like a flash of lightning, that he was the subject of the little story. A sudden rush of blood suffused his face with a fiery hue. He looked around in a quick, shamefaced way. He was alone. Then with convulsive hands he took up the paper he had let fall and reread the article for the second, third, and fourth time. The more he read it the more the fearful suspicion took form in his mind, and it so overwhelmed him, mentally and physically, that his whole body, with the exception of his head, grew suddenly icy cold.

The first idea that came to him with returning self-possession was, "I'll go at once to the office of 'The Youth' and reduce them all to fragments."

He put on his hat and left the room, but on the staircase another side of the picture presented itself to him—the great scandal and commotion he would cause in the town, the laughing-stock he would be in the place, and how his enemies, or rather those of his father-in-law, would delight in turning upon him.

He remounted the staircase and returned to the Club to think a minute. After taking two or three turns up and down the room without knowing if he were moving or motionless, he altered his mind.

He took the paper, folded it deliberately, put it in his pocket, then went slowly down the iron stair-

case, and turned homeward with a slow step, pale face, and stony glance.

His sense of strength and rage had restored his self-possession.

"Is the señorita in her room?" he asked the servant who opened the door.

"I think so, señor; I will ask the maid."

"No, no; don't ask anybody; I will go myself."

And he went up to the room which they had had since the duke had occupied the first floor. On passing from the passage he did not notice Doña Paula, who was sitting near the door, and who was aghast at his strange expression of countenance. Venturita was standing before the mirror. On seeing her husband she said, without turning her head:

"Hollo! I thought you had gone out. What is up now?"

Gonzalo drew the paper from his pocket, unfolded it slowly, and handed it to her, saying:

"This."

"And what is this?" asked the girl in surprise.

"A paper."

"Yes, I see—but what of it?"

"It contains a very interesting little story. Read it. Here in the third column, underneath these verses."

There were three or four pots of flowers in the room, which had been used for the portrait that

was standing against the wall, waiting to be hung up in the drawing-room. Gonzalo's eyes grew dark as they fell upon this picture of his wife, redder than a rose and more golden than a canary, and with a mystic expression on her face such as he had never seen.

The duke had talked of sending the portrait to the Salon in Paris. While Ventura read the paper he kept his eyes fixed upon her face with breathless attention, but she did not waver under his gaze; she only grew a little pale as she read the last lines and returned him the paper.

"Why did you ask me to read that? I don't understand."

"Well, I will explain it to you," returned Gonzalo, accentuating each syllable in suppressed rage. "I asked you to read this because the mandarin mentioned in it is the Duke of Tornos, you are the Chinese lady, and I am the Chinaman—do you understand now?"

At these words he glared at his wife in a terrible way, and crushed up in his hand a bough of a plant that was standing beside him.

Ventura met the look without wincing, and seemed more surprised than alarmed; she hesitated for an instant, while her lips moved to reply, and she ended by bursting into a loud laugh.

"*Ave Maria!* what an atrocity!"

"I am in earnest, Ventura," returned the young

man; "this that excites your derision is a very serious matter, and your happiness and mine are at stake."

Ventura only replied by another peal of laughter, and another, until she bubbled over with laughter, but Gonzalo was not blind to the affectation of her merriment.

"Take care, Ventura, take care," he said with his face fraught with fury; "recollect I am speaking seriously now."

"But, my dear fellow—ha! ha!—do you expect me not to laugh when you tell me—ha! ha!—that you are a Chinaman and I am a Chinese lady?—ha! ha! ha!" and her laughter grew more affected every minute.

"It is now some days since I ought to have put matters straight," continued the husband, gloomily, after a pause. "This unwarranted, inconvenient, stupid, familiar attitude that you take with the duke before people irritated me exceedingly—but I wasn't going to expose myself to ridicule by saying so. Jealous men always look ridiculous—but you see what has happened by my being too remiss."

So saying, he broke off the branch he was clutching and crushed it in his hand.

"But you are really jealous now, are you not?" she asked in tones of mingled cajolery and endearment.

"If I were, I should be silent, Ventura—I should be silent and watchful; and if my jealousy were well grounded—I learned what to do before the priest read me Saint Paul's epistles. But there is no question of jealousy here; the age and position of the duke preclude it, and I don't insult you by supposing you prefer him to me. The point is, the ridicule which your imprudence has brought upon me. You don't see, you stupid girl, that we have the eye of the public upon us; that we have lots of enemies, and that they seize the smallest pretext to attack us."

"Well, you acknowledge it is only a pretext to annoy you."

"Yes; but it is founded on your inherent vanity, which I have never been able to break you of."

"Let us understand each other, Gonzalo. What have I done?" she asked in an injured tone.

The young man was silent as he looked at her sternly. Then after some minutes he said slowly:

"You know too well. Repeating it degrades me."

There was another pause of silence, and then Ventura said somewhat impatiently:

"Well, what do you want?"

"I am going to tell you," returned the young man, restraining himself with difficulty. "I want this objectionable friendship to cease, as you see it is most derogatory to me. I want you not to think

any more of the Duke of Tornos, nor to take any notice of his suave smile nor of his generally compromising flirting manners. I want to resume the calm tenor of our lives, such as it was before his arrival; and as that is my wish, I intend to have it done at all costs."

He was silent for a minute, and then, with a vehemence beyond what the occasion required, he added:

"This very day the duke shall leave the house."

Ventura looked at him in amazement. She turned suddenly livid, and with her lips trembling with rage she exclaimed:

"What do you mean? You will have to be taken to Leganes. Come, come," she added in a more conciliatory tone, "do me the kindness to leave me in peace, and go and calm yourself, for you really require it."

Gonzalo's face then became distorted with fury, his lips wreathed with fierce sarcasm, and his eyes flamed.

"Ah!" he roared, more than said, "take the friendship of this rake, for he is a rake, and all Spain knows it; you think more of it than of your husband's happiness; but don't think for an instant that because I am not a duke and a grandee that I don't know how to protect my honor! Look here! Look here! This is the respect that I have for the duke."

And at these words he gave the picture a kick which leveled it to the ground with a great noise. Then he seized hold of it, with his teeth set, his eyes bloodshot, and a prey to one of those paroxysms of rage to which powerful phlegmatic people are sometimes subject. The canvas was soon in pieces; and Ventura, utterly dumfounded, but with the daring of a spoiled woman, gasped out:

"Brute! Brute!"

The tone of this insult was so fierce with rage that Gonzalo raised his head as if he had been struck with a red-hot iron; and springing upon her, he seized her by the arm. The girl uttered a cry of agony—her husband's hand held her with a steel-like grip that went to the very bone.

"Forgive her, Gonzalo, forgive her!" exclaimed Doña Paula, intervening.

The infuriated man turned his head without loosening his hold of his wife. At the sight of his mother-in-law, in whose face, now convulsed with terror, illness had made such cruel ravages, gazing at him with imploring eyes and hands clasped in entreaty, his hand let go of Ventura and fell to his side.

He had no time to say anything. Doña Paula, without looking at her daughter, dragged him by the coat-sleeve, saying:

"Come, my son, come; I will settle this matter, and calm you down."

And Gonzalo, overwhelmed with shame, let himself be taken away like an automaton. On reaching her room the good lady locked the door.

"I heard all," she said, as she fixed upon him her large, dark eyes, as sad as those of a Dolorosa, the last remnant of her beauty. "I saw you cross the passage, looking so strange that I couldn't help following you. I don't know what it says in this paper that you have given Venturita, but it must be something very repulsive and objectionable."

"The greatest insult that a man can have!" returned Gonzalo in a stifled tone.

"How infamous! Insult you, who have never hurt them! You are right. It is Ventura's fault: her frivolity and the silly ideas that she gets into her head have caused this trouble, as they have caused other slighter ones that you have had. But do not imagine for an instant that there is anything bad about Ventura. She is a giddy creature, a little flirt, but she is not bad at heart; she will improve with time. I, also, have had my share of pride, and committed fooleries that put me to shame to think of now! Oh, years, sadness, and sickness take all the nonsense out of one! The thing now is to prevent any worse consequences. I have noticed for some time the duke's attentions, and the intimacy which has sprung up between them. I know quite well that there is nothing in it; I am as certain of my daughter as you must be;

but I can quite understand that the conduct of this man is annoying to you. Moreover, when a paper takes the opportunity of insulting you, it is time matters were put on another footing; some step must be taken."

"It is come to this," said Gonzalo moodily, "I send the duke out of the house this very day."

"No, you can not and must not do so; you are quick-tempered, and there would be a violent scene, which must be avoided."

"But it is precisely this scene that I want!"

"Don't be childish, Gonzalo," replied the lady. "It is for me to settle this matter, because Rosendo neither sees, hears, nor understands anything beyond politics. A scandal just now would make you ridiculous."

"Never mind!" exclaimed the young man in a rage. "I want the pleasure of kicking him out of the house."

"You force me to say, then, Gonzalo," returned Doña Paula in a tone of impatience tinged with authority, "that you have no right to do so. It was not you who invited him, neither are you the master of the house."

The young man colored deeply; and noting his confusion the lady added, in an affectionate tone:

"You are our son, and sons do not interfere in the affairs of their parents. It is they who have the duty of watching over their happiness and sacrific-

ing themselves for it. I will see that the duke leaves the house without any scandal, and without any one suspecting the reason, or your doing anything which you would regret afterward. Don't think that I do it for his sake, for I detest him. From the moment the man arrived he filled me with the greatest repulsion. Now that I see what he has brought upon our family, you can imagine how I dislike him. I only do it for your sake, because I love you, I will not say any more than my daughter—because one's children, oh! one's children! you know what they are—but, at least as much, and I esteem you much higher."

Gonzalo, quite overcome, dropped into a chair, and began sobbing like a child, with his face in his hands. The good lady placed her thin, white hand on his head, and, with tears in her eyes, she said:

"My poor boy! I will set this matter right."

CHAPTER XXVII

A TERM OF PEACE

THE Señora de Belinchon descended the iron staircase leading to the second floor, and, meeting the grandee's valet, she asked:

"What is the señor duke doing?"

"He is painting," replied the servant, looking with surprise and astonishment at Doña Paula's red eyes.

"Tell him that I wish to speak to him."

While the man went to inform his master, Doña Paula thought her strength would give way, for she began to feel premonitory symptoms of the spasms to which she was occasionally subject; but her strong wish to restore peace to her children overcame her weakness at the moment. Commending herself to our Lady of Pity, she entered Don Jaime's study, full of resolution.

The señor, clad in the fantastic garb worn at home in the morning, came forward to receive her with his palette and brushes in his hand.

"Señora," he said, bowing respectfully and raising the gold-tasseled Turkish cap that covered his head, "I am sorry you troubled to come up. A

message would have summoned me immediately to your presence."

Doña Paula made a gesture of thanks, putting her hand to her heart, which was beating at her side like a sledge-hammer. The duke looked at her in surprise.

"Take a seat, señora," he said, putting his palette and brushes on a chair.

Whereupon the lady dropped into an armchair, and Don Jaime remained standing.

"The door must be shut," she said, beginning to rise from her seat; but the gentleman anticipated her, and then took up his stand in front of the lady, squaring his feet with exaggerated respect, and waiting for her to speak.

Several minutes passed in silence, then, raising her sad eyes, she said:

"Señor duke, you have conferred a great honor on us in coming to our house. We can never sufficiently thank you for this mark of favor—"

The duke bowed as he raised his heavy eyelids to cast upon his interlocutor a look tinged with curiosity.

"Why do you not sit down?" asked Doña Paula, interrupting her speech.

"I am very comfortable, señora; continue."

But the interruption had upset her; she could not proceed for some minutes. Finally she murmured:

"It is dreadful!—you do not know, señor duke, what I am going through now. I wish I were dead!"

And the tears rushing to her eyes, she drew her handkerchief from her pocket and buried her face in it.

The duke, now quite astonished, said:

"Calm yourself, señora. I am a true friend of both you and De Belichon. Whatever trouble you may have, let me share it as if it were mine, and I will do what I can to assuage it."

"Many thanks, many thanks," murmured the lady, without taking her handkerchief from her eyes; and after a minute's silence she said in a trembling voice:

"Will you do me a very great favor? A favor for which I will thank you all the days of my life —but I don't dare ask it?"

"I repeat that I am at your service; and that anything I can do for you, you may consider done."

"Oh! no, it is outrageous in me! You would never think, señor duke, that your visit to this house has caused much misery. Your attention and your admiration of my daughter Ventura's frank, merry disposition have given rise to remarks in the town."

"Oh!" interrupted the duke, smiling to hide a certain feeling of shame.

"Yes, very offensive remarks about all of us;

more especially about my son-in-law, who is as dear to us as if he were our own son. I do not blame you or her. I am sure that in your case it has only been due to overattention, which, in a little place like this, where nothing escapes notice— Perhaps you, señor, ought not to have— She has been imprudent and frivolous, she was always faulty in that way— She is a girl with a will of her own, as one may say— If there were no divisions in the town there would not be this fearful feud, which is nearly the death of us; probably nobody would have noticed— Unfortunately our enemies seize on the most trifling pretext to annoy us and put us to shame— An article has come out which attacks my son-in-law in such a shameless way— And this I can not allow—"

Doña Paula's courtesy had diminished with her speech, and the final words were rapped out defiantly. A slight flush suffused the duke's affrighted face. He ought, of course, to have seen the gravity of the situation, but he merely thought: "This person is reading me a lesson."

"I am very sorry," he said in an obsequious tone, "to have caused you all any trouble. But I am so used to being an object of public comment and attack that the remarks and articles you have just mentioned don't annoy me in the slightest. The lower classes always try to pay off the superiority of the upper ones by finding fault with them. It

is the eternal law of give and take that can not be altered."

"That is all very well, señor duke, for such an exalted personage as yourself— But we are quite different; we are not in such a high position, and evil tongues, you must know, can do us a lot of harm," returned Doña Paula, so simply that it sounded ironical.

The duke, somewhat irritated, played nervously with the tassel of the cap he held in his hand, as he said:

"I repeat, I am very sorry, señora. If I had thought that my innocent attentions to your daughter could have been subjected to such malignant interpretation, I would have been more careful in proffering them. In the future I will be more discreet. Lord!" he added, smiling, "how is it possible to imagine that a man of my years could regard a child like Ventura in any but a paternal way!"

This remark was supposed to completely exculpate him.

"Oh, señor duke, men in your position are never old. The brilliancy of it is attractive to women— Therefore, it is not sufficient to be merely more prudent in the future; the world must be robbed of all pretext for remarks—"

The duke turned suddenly pale, hesitated a few seconds, and finally said:

"By my leaving the house, eh?"

"This was the favor I came to beg of you," she said without raising her eyes, and in a tone of humility.

Don Jaime turned a shade paler, took a turn up and down the room, crushing the Turkish cap in his clenched hand, uttered a sarcastic laugh, and returning to his place in front of Doña Paula, he said with mocking arrogance:

"So you turn me out of the house, señora?"

"I, señor duke? What an idea! The only thing I want is to restore peace to my children and avoid a catastrophe."

"What catastrophe?" asked the duke, while an ominous light shone in his dull eyes.

Doña Paula saw it boded danger for her son-in-law, so she hastened to repair her slip.

"The catastrophe of my son-in-law being insulted by those wretches— Look here, señor, if you are offended at the request I have just made you make a great mistake— We are so honored at your coming to our house that nothing could have flattered us so much as this favor— My husband exerted himself to prefer the request, and he was delighted when he heard that you accepted the invitation. You can never understand how proud I was to have such a distinguished person in my house— I, a woman of the people, the daughter of a sailor, the granddaughter of a watch-

man, known in the place as the Serena, as my mother and grandmother were before me—certainly I should have been prouder still if it had been some years ago—one's pride decreases with disillusions and troubles. But at all events I am very flattered, and only the fear of the great troubles which may accrue to my children obliges me to take this step; so you will forgive me, señor."

Don Jaime took another turn across the room, stopped in the centre to think a minute, and ended by shrugging his shoulders and wreathing his lips in a scornful way. Then advancing toward Doña Paula, he said:

"Is your husband aware of the step you have just taken?"

"No, señor; and I shall be glad if it could be settled without his knowledge."

"Perfectly. It shall be done to-day."

"Oh, señor duke! a thousand thanks— You will forgive—" she exclaimed, rising from her seat and extending her hands to him.

The grandee bowed low without replying.

"I entreat you not to bear me malice."

"The subject of our conversation will remain quite between us. We will manage to avoid disclosing the reason of my departure. Try to play your part well. I will answer for my own."

Doña Paula quitted the room, escorted by the

duke, who led her to the door with an exaggerated, silent politeness.

On reaching the staircase the anxious lady, once more alone, breathed freely. Although it had been at the cost of so many painful emotions, she was delighted at having arranged the matter without any scandal or danger. And with a fleet foot she who generally dragged herself about in ill-health now ran to Gonzalo to tell him the result of her mission.

At luncheon the duke mentioned that he had received a letter from one of his sons, saying he was coming to spend the month of September with him in Sarrio; and his brother, the Marques del Riego, would probably also come. He had therefore decided to take rooms at the hotel. Don Rosendo, seconded by his wife, immediately strongly opposed the step, while Gonzalo, with gloomy face and lowered eyes, continued his meal in silence during the discussion.

In spite of all Don Rosendo's arguments to make him stay, even representing that the house was large enough to receive the new guests, the sorrow which his whole family would feel at this unexpected departure, etc., etc., the duke was obdurate, although he responded with his usual patronizing smile, and a flow of pleasant, friendly phrases. At last it was seen that persuasion was useless, and the depressed Don Rosendo accompanied the duke and his secretary on the inspection of the rooms at the

only decent hotel the town possessed. The first floor was taken, and on the following day the duke moved into it, in spite of his host's urgent entreaties that he would at least stay until the arrival of his relatives.

The whole place was taken by surprise at the move, and eagerly inquired the cause. But although Don Rosendo gave everybody a full account of the whole occurrence, it was impossible to prevent people suspecting that things had not been just as they were told by Belinchon. His enemies were particularly active in unraveling the mystery, thinking, not without reason, that the Club party would not have the duke's influence to oppose them. During the two months and more of the grandee's residence in Sarrio, the friends of Don Rosendo had successfully brought into court an indictment against the mayor; the administrator of the posts, who was of the Cabin party, had been withdrawn, and the problem of the slaughter-house had been solved according to Belinchon's opinion.

Maza's friends, who had been going about like doomed flies in autumn, received the fresh news like a tardy ray of sunlight. Holy Heavens! what excited talk took place that night in the Cabin! Joy shone in all their eyes, their nostrils dilated with delight as they anticipated the fall of the Club party and a decisive, a grand victory for themselves. "The Youth of Sarrio" published in its

next number the following laconic but venomous paragraph:

"His excellency, the Señor Duke of Tornos, who was the guest of Don Rosendo Belinchon, has moved to the first floor apartments of the Estella Hotel. We offer the honored duke our sincerest congratulations."

This disgraceful notice made Belinchon ill for days, and then he sent his seconds to Maza. But the mayor returned that they could not fight while he was in office, but when that was over he would see if he could not cross swords with such a blusterer. Then the seconds replying in a similar tone, they were threatened with imprisonment and had to retire.

The Duke of Tornos continued visiting Don Rosendo's house occasionally, and Belinchon and his friends always accompanied him when he went out. The friendship between them remained outwardly the same. The small neutral party in Sarrio thought that there was no mystery in his move, and that it all originated in the ridiculous imaginations of the Cabin party, who were blinded by the desire to get the better of their adversaries. However, some days had elapsed, and September had come in without bringing the advent of either the grandee's son or brother. The duke himself had so much improved in health in Sarrio that he had his carriage and horses brought from Madrid, and

bought a charming little fishing-boat. He seemed disposed to spend some months in Sarrio. In his exterior relations with the Belinchon family—that is to say, when he met them in the town—he assumed a courteous, kind manner befitting people deserving much attention. He did not take such a familiar tone with Venturita as before, but he chatted with her in the theatre and at the Promenade in a playful way. Thus those who pried into the reason of his leaving the house were put off the scent. Doña Paula was very pleased at this behavior, and Gonzalo even, seeing that he could not expect more, was courteous and polite to him.

Peace reigned again between the young couple. Venturita after a few days, during which she looked pale and cross, and exchanged no word with her husband, doubtless being hurt by the violence he had shown in the scene described, resumed her usual demeanor—merry and pleasant sometimes, cross and capricious at others, and always ready with a sharp, sarcastic remark. Nevertheless, Gonzalo noticed an unaccustomed amiability and deference in her manner, and he attributed it to her desire to blot out the recollection of that transient but perilous trouble they had undergone.

So the days drifted quietly by in Don Rosendo's house, only disturbed by Doña Paula's attacks of illness. She was as often in bed as up, but she took long drives with Cecilia, or Ventura, and often had

her grandchild Cecilita, whom she worshiped, with her. Don Rufo talked of the necessity of her moving to another climate, to a place above the level of the sea, where the air would be clearer, and Don Rosendo, although possessed with the desire of exterminating his enemies and conferring happiness on his natal town, entertained the idea of moving, albeit with some repugnance, and amused himself by weaving vague grand utilitarian plans as usual. He was inspired with the happy notion of transferring "The Light of Sarrio" to Madrid, and making it a daily paper under the title of "The Light of the Provinces," to defend the moral and material interests of the provinces; to maintain their autonomic life independent and free in face of the monopolizing action and power of the capital, "a raging fire that dries up the sap of the nation and devours her inherited wealth." What a great and noble thought!

At the end of October Gonzalo went to Lancia on business for his father-in-law. It was a question of persuading a banker of the town not to proceed with certain negotiations with a capitalist in Sarrio, a certain member of the Cabin, according to report; anyhow, he was to let Don Rosendo have the refusal of the offer in question on the same terms.

Gonzalo had been away two days. At dusk on the afternoon of the third day Doña Paula thought

she would go up and see Ventura, who had returned to the second floor after the duke's departure. The good lady very rarely ascended that iron staircase. But that day she felt stronger, she had less pain in her side, and she wanted to try her strength and prove to herself how much better she was. The immediate object of her visit was to take her little granddaughter Cecilita a doll which the maid had just finished dressing. The stairs seemed very high. When she was half-way up she stopped to take breath, and on reaching the landing she called as loudly as she could:

"Cecilita, my child, where are you?"

"Here, grandma, here," returned the child, coming out of her mother's room.

She was a little creature, not yet three years old, with sunny golden hair, and so spontaneous in her baby talk that her grandmother quite adored her.

"What have you got for me, grandma? What have you got for me?" she asked, looking eagerly at Doña Paula, after having nearly knocked her over in the impetuous way she caught her by the legs.

"The doll, my child, with its new frock."

"No doll—the doll for Lalina— I'se big—I want chocolate."

"I have no chocolate here, my darling," replied the grandmother, looking lovingly at the child.

"Mama has chocolates—come and give me one."

And the little girl dragged her grandmother by the dress to her mother's room. On entering it the child seemed surprised, and looked about everywhere, while Ventura came forward and embraced her mother affectionately.

"My goodness! what a surprise! whatever brought you here? I don't know that it is good for you to come upstairs like this. Do you feel all right?"

"I am not very tired. I think I am better. Dehand's pills seem to do me good."

"That's right. I am glad we have at last hit upon a medicine that does some good. Won't you sit down?"

"Grandma, give me a chocolate," said the child, interrupting them.

"I haven't any, my dear. Have you any caramels, Ventura?"

"No."

"Jaime has some, and he is here."

Venturita turned dreadfully pale.

"What Jaime, child?" asked Doña Paula.

"Nobody, nobody; some nonsense. Well, these pills suit you, then? Suppose Don Rufo heard of it. Suppose he heard of it!" Ventura repeated in such a trembling voice and looking so confused that her mother gazed at her in astonishment.

"Jaime is here—he has chocolate; come and see, grandma."

Whereupon the child dragged Doña Paula by the dress, and the lady, vaguely apprehending something terrible, let herself be led without knowing what she was doing.

"Cecilia!" cried Ventura in a voice unlike that ever heard by her mother.

However, the child paid no heed, and went on dragging her grandmother toward the bedroom. But before they reached the door the Duke of Tornos appeared on the threshold.

At the sight of the sudden apparition Doña Paula stood rooted to the spot, with her face white and terrified and her eyes staring in amazement. Then she fell heavily to the floor, dragging the child with her.

The duke hastened to raise her, and then, obedient to an imperious gesture of Ventura, he laid her on the sofa and took his departure.

The cries of the girl soon brought up the servants and her sister. It was thought it was a faint brought on by overfatigue. She was carried to her room, where, thanks to Cecilia's care, she recovered consciousness, but not her faculty of speech. The unhappy lady was powerless to articulate a word. Two days went by, and the efforts of both Don Rufo and another doctor who came from Lancia were powerless to restore action to the paralyzed tongue.

She generally lay with her eyes shut, while

soft sighs escaped her lips; but when Venturita entered the room she opened her eyes, and fixed them on her with an expression full of anguish and reproach.

Two days later, and almost at the same hour in which the fatal scene had taken place, the unhappy lady expired, with her grief-stricken eyes still fixed on Venturita's face, even in the hour of death.

CHAPTER XXVIII

GONZALO BECOMES MAYOR

THE Belinchon family retired to Tejada to mourn their bereavement in seclusion for some time.

Doña Paula was mourned, as she deserved to be, by her magnanimous husband, who, waiving his ideas of progress and reform, was not remiss in showing signs of grief and affection, which, in my opinion, in no wise detracted from his public dignity.

It was long before Cecilia ceased to mourn the loss of her mother, to whom she had been bound as much by ties of sympathy as of blood. She was more like Doña Paula than any other of the children, although she had not been the favorite. Pablo, the pet, felt it as much as he was capable of feeling anything; but, according to report, in a few days he was seen at full trot on his last purchase in horseflesh, so he could not be said to mourn very deeply.

But it was particularly on Venturita that the sudden death had a sad and strange effect. She

was so overcome that she was for some days in bed in a high fever. When she recovered she looked pale and sad, replied abstractedly when she was spoken to, and in spite of her husband's entreaties she rarely left her room. This grief, as great as it was unexpected, was a proof to Gonzalo of the truth of Cecilia and Doña Paula's continual assertions that Venturita might be wild, capricious, and vain, but she had a good heart. This was a great alleviation to the sincere sorrow he felt at the death of his mother-in-law, for the final and maternal service she rendered him had put the seal to the affection with which her constant kindness had inspired him.

The Duke of Tornos returned to Madrid shortly after his friend's affliction.

From thence he corresponded with Don Rosendo, and frequently did him a good turn in the ceaseless feud that he maintained against his enemies of the Cabin.

These services were finally crowned by the Grand Cross of Isabel the Catholic. The grandee forwarded with the diploma the Order set in diamonds worth not less than 20,000 reales.

Don Rosendo's gratitude and emotion on the receipt of the great mark of honor can be imagined. As nobody in Sarrio owned the Grand Cross, he had to go to Lancia for a knight of the Order to complete the honor by decorating him with it.

And now that he was a knight, he who had professed a certain metaphysical scorn for all religious observances now joined in the procession of the parish, so as to carry a light, with the Order on his breast and the ribbon across his frock coat.

All this was gall and wormwood to Maza's party, and their spite thereat was let off not only at the Cabin, but in the periodical, in which the famous founder of "The Light of Sarrio" was made the subject of both comic and serious attacks.

In some of the fierce and caustic paragraphs one could almost see the bilious mayor, pen in hand.

For the first time in his life Don Rosendo read the diatribes with no sensation beyond that of infinite scorn. When the apogee of society is reached, attacks from pygmies seem more curious than offensive. The event roused Venturita from her lethargic, gloomy state. One of her dreams had been realized, and she participated in the pride and glory of her father, even to appearing sometimes in the town, but, of course, always in the carriage.

She adopted a haughtier mien, and her languid, grand, ladylike air made all the ladies of the town nearly die of envy, although they avenged themselves for her contemptuous manners by calling her, in their hours of spleen, "The Codfish Princess."

The death of her mother, whom everybody had

known "with the handkerchief tied behind," as they say, had contributed as much as the Grand Cross of her father to raise the social status of the family, or rather to make it aristocratic.

Venturita, with her scornful demeanor, her costly costumes, and the disdainful coolness with which she treated her acquaintances, effectually avenged the poor woman who had been made to undergo such a lifelong mortification at the hands of the ladies of Sarrio.

The winter passed away at Tejada—a winter unusually inclement. Sometimes it rained a great deal, which made it impossible to leave the house; at other times there was a severe frost; the sky was clear, but in the mornings the fields looked white with a coating of frost half an inch thick. All these meteorological phenomena hold charms for those who love the country. Gonzalo was born to revel in these fluctuations of Nature. If it froze, he rose early in the morning and, to the astonishment of the household, he went out into the corridor, where he washed himself with the water which he had brought from the marble fountain basin after breaking the ice. Then, donning a light shooting suit, he took his gun and went off on one of his wonderfully long walks of sixteen or eighteen miles, without any one hearing him complain of fatigue afterward.

If it snowed, he put on his waterproof, his high

boots, and his fur cap, and went shooting wild pigeons or hares about the estate. More than once he fell into one of the reservoirs filled with snow, and it was only through his extraordinary strength that he managed to get out. And then the country offered other pleasures unknown in town. The groups of trees and bushes were pleasant to the eye; the dark green of the conifera looked clear and bright with the collection of water on their branches, which the frost soon solidified; the leaves of the magnolias shone like crystals, and both the face and coloring of Nature were incessant in their changes, and the forms of the trees and the mountains were also subject to endless variations.

Even the monotonous pattering of the rain upon the foliage gave a pleasant, reposeful feeling quite luxurious to those who had nothing to do out of doors, and who had within all the comforts and luxuries of the rich. It was pleasant to hear the chirping of the sparrows, who resorted by hundreds to a large Washingtonia near the house as if it were a great aviary. It was amusing to Gonzalo to feed the little exotic creatures that Don Rosendo had on his property after walking over to the cages in wooden shoes, and it was also delightful to doze in an armchair by the fireside with a cigar in his mouth and a bottle of rum by his side, while Cecilia read aloud either an interesting story or some harmonious, sonorous poetry.

Don Rosendo and Pablo went regularly every day to Sarrio, and came back to dinner. Don Rosendo occupied himself in directing public opinion along the path of progress, both moral and material, and in crushing those "reptiles who grovel in the mud because they are incapable of rising to the high regions of ideas, and then eject their venom on every one superior to them in intelligence or virtue"—it is unnecessary to mention the names of "those reptiles" alluded to in his articles so frequently by Don Rosendo—and Pablo was engaged in laying siege to the hearts of several fair strangers who had arrived in the town.

One morning he went out shooting with his brother-in-law, but finding that the cold spoiled his complexion, he gave up the sport almost entirely. Besides, Piscis greatly objected to it, for a clever centaur like him cared for nothing on earth but horses.

In the afternoon, when it rained, Ventura played *tresillo* with Cecilia and Gonzalo if she were in a good humor, and if not, the two latter played *tute* together, with a child seated on the lap of each; and although the little girls upset the game every moment by taking up a card in their tiny hands, the players were so good-tempered that they merely took them gently from them.

"Be quiet, Cecilita, be quiet; if you show your aunt my cards she will win."

"Never mind, auntie dear, look at them," said the child, laughing. When the game was over the elders watched the children make houses with the cards, while the raindrops pattered on the Chinese windows and the logs of wood crackled on the hearth. The children had their meals with the family, and attending to them was an important occupation to Cecilia, for she had to serve them, to tie their bibs on, give them water, and see that they did not drop their food. When Gonzalo was at home he delighted in assisting at this repast and standing like a butler behind the chairs of his children. Then when they had to be taken up to bed, Cecilia took one in her arms, and Gonzalo the other, and they carried them to the room where they both slept. The task of undressing them was long and complicated. Gonzalo, in spite of his ox-like strength, was as gentle as a woman in untying their strings and moving their little bodies from one side to another without hurting them. Sometimes the hands of the brother and sister-in-law touched each other; then a slight cloud overshadowed her smiling face, but Gonzalo noticed nothing. When the little ones were in bed, they smilingly listened to the innocent prayers which Cecilita said to "auntie." Paulina did not yet know how to address the Supreme Being, and so she only made the sign of the cross. While they were going to sleep, papa and auntie had to re-

main close by the bedside without moving. If they talked together, the children were disturbed, and were a long time getting to sleep. Therefore they tried to keep silent, or they only exchanged a few words in low voices.

Cecilita could not sleep without holding one of her aunt's ears. Gonzalo often objected to this fancy, and every day he spoke of making her give it up; but his sister-in-law did not mind it, and she even bent over the pillow to indulge it. Sometimes Gonzalo fell asleep on Paulina's pillow, especially when he had been out shooting, and on waking up he found himself close to the sweet, pale face of his sister-in-law, whose wide-open eyes were fixed on space.

"What are you thinking about, bag of bones?" he asked her as his eyes met hers.

The girl collected herself with an effort, and smiled kindly.

"I don't know—nothing."

"Haven't you a lover?" he said one evening, raising her chin affectionately.

"Bah! what lovers could I have in this place?" said Cecilia, coloring, and withdrawing her face.

"You could have one in Sarrio."

"And he can't care much not to come and see me all the months that we have been here. I have already told you that I am going to remain an old maid," she added with a smile.

"That can't be," replied the young man with fervor; "it can't be. It would be a shame to poor humanity for you to remain an old maid. You were born to be married. Your chief delights are in managing the house, looking after children, sewing and dusting. You will be a perfect wife, like Luis de Leon describes. It is intolerable to think of any one who could make any man happy remaining an old maid."

We do not know what Cecilia's thoughts were just then; but they were probably something like this: "Yes; I could have made any man happy but you."

She opened her lips with a gesture of indifference, and replied:

"What has that to do with it? All women who are not pretty have these qualities. Those who shine in the world think of their clothes, and they are right."

There was a sad, despairing irony in these words which Gonzalo could not but feel in his heart.

"Oh! you always talk this nonsense. I believe you put on this modesty to be contradicted—besides, we know that you can shine with the first. You have eyes that are unequaled; you are graceful, elegant, even of distinguished bearing. What do you want more, bag of bones? The thing is, señorita, you have more here than here." And he put his finger first on his forehead, and then on

his heart. "When somebody comes along who really interests you, you will see how all these ideas about celibacy will disappear."

Cecilia shrugged her shoulders and resumed her far-away look as she dropped the conversation.

With the month of April the family returned to Sarrio.

The municipal elections took place in June, and Gonzalo was elected town councilor against his will. Don Rosendo imposed the sacrifice upon him.

Ventura regained her spirits with the approach of summer. She went out more frequently, and her open carriage always created a certain sensation. The fact was, it was very grand with its trappings from Paris. She liked to dress in black, for in her vanity she knew that it enhanced the brilliancy of her complexion, and brought out the golden hue of her hair. When she went to the eleven o'clock mass, which was the most crowded service, her presence excited a repressed murmur of curiosity among the women and of admiration among the men. The princess-like air that exasperated the ladies was what delighted the men. They all agreed that her beauty, elegance, and distinguished manners made her far superior to the other young women in the town, and would create quite a sensation in more aristocratic circles. Ventura had been of the same opinion for some time,

and she turned over in her head the idea of going to live in Madrid.

When she suggested it to her husband he expressed a great objection to the plan; he was not a man for the court; the social duties imposed by etiquette would be distasteful to him, for he was born for liberty, the enjoyment of the open air and sea, bodily exercise, and easy homely occupations. Besides, he was quite aware that the income upon which they lived among the first people in Sarrio would not be sufficient to keep them on the same social plane in Madrid, particularly with his wife's disposition. Nevertheless, Venturita was so sure of overcoming these objections that she ceased speaking of the project, but kept on thinking of the time and means of its fulfilment.

An event then occurred to disturb the life of the Belinchon family. Gonzalo was unexpectedly elected mayor of Sarrio through the influence of the Duke of Tornos. His first idea was to decline the appointment with some excuse, but Don Rosendo and all his friends were so eager and hot about his accepting it that he could not avoid doing so. The members of the Club were somewhat upset about it; they considered they were put upon, for the new mayor would never allow the foundations of their enemies' houses to be laid bare, as Maza did, neither would he resort to any other extreme measure of their suggesting.

In the month of September, when the bathing season was over which filled the town with guests, and shooting began in the country, Gonzalo returned with his family to Tejada. The children were very well there, and he always liked it; besides, there was not much going on just then in Sarrio. His office of mayor somewhat stood in the way of this move, but he arranged with his municipal colleagues to go to town every day, or at least very frequently. The journey could be made in a carriage in less than half an hour. Moreover, Don Rosendo kept his house open, so that Gonzalo could dine and sleep there as often as he liked.

As Venturita was thinking of going to Madrid the next spring, she made no objection to these plans of her husband; and he was glad to have made this arrangement when he found that the Duke of Tornos was coming in October, for life in Madrid had brought a recurrence of the malady which the air of Sarrio had benefited. Unwilling as he would have been to confess it, Gonzalo still felt the sting of jealousy in the inmost depths of his heart, and neither reflection nor specious argument with himself could eradicate it.

While the duke was away he was free from that feeling, but the news of his approaching arrival was a vexation to him, if not an actual trouble. And in effect, at the end of October there was no escape from going to meet him at Lancia with his

father-in-law and several gentlemen, all members of the Club. The mayor's appointment through his influence made the grandee a powerful patron of the party. He put up at the Estella Hotel with his secretary, and began the outdoor life which he said, with truth, suited him so well. Several fine days he went out fishing, or walking, or shooting, or riding. This time he only brought two horses with him: one for a tilbury, and a magnificent saddle one; so when the secretary rode, he used a horse that Don Rosendo put at his disposal.

The duke maintained cordial relations with the Belinchon family, but he had only been to Tejada three times in a fortnight. As Ventura and Cecilia frequently came to Sarrio, he saw them and talked to them, although he avoided being with them in public.

After the duke's arrival Gonzalo assiduously read "The Youth of Sarrio," which now like "The Light" came out three times a week. He read it to soothe the uneasiness which he felt, because he was in continual fear of some insulting paragraph like that which enraged him so much the previous summer. In the first numbers after the grandee arrived, "The Youth" contented itself with showing its hostility toward the duke by making fun of him under such transparent nicknames as those of "painter," "fisher," and even "politician," and insinuating the idea that the duke was a person de-

spised in Madrid, dismissed from court, and without influence with the Government. Some stories of his life were brought to light which were not much to his credit; and even his habits about his clothes and cravats were made fun of. Don Jaime did not read such an obscure journal; but when Peña showed him what was said about him he smiled maliciously, and wrote to the governor of the province asking him to take the first opportunity of suppressing the paper. The Club party hearing of this letter, joyfully anticipated the blow.

CHAPTER XXIX

A WOMAN'S SACRIFICE FOR HER BROTHER-IN-LAW

At last the poisoned arrow so much dreaded by Gonzalo pierced his heart; it was not a paragraph, it was a story, supposed to have taken place in Scotland, in which he, his wife, Don Rosendo, and other well-known people were made atrocious objects of ridicule. Among other things, it was said that while the sheriff (evidently Gonzalo) was assiduously fulfilling the duties of his office, Lord Trollope (the duke) undertook for him the duties of husband to his beautiful wife.

Gonzalo felt the same sense of rage and misery as before; but this time he decided to control himself and find out if there were any truth in the malignant insinuation, and if unfortunately there should be, he would take full and complete revenge.

It cost him great trouble to hide the feelings which preyed upon him, unaccustomed as he was to dissimulation, but he was greatly helped by his strong desire to put an end to his doubts. The only thing noticeable about him was that he seemed

rather sad and preoccupied. He devoted himself for some days to watching his wife, never losing sight of her for an instant; but he discovered nothing to confirm his suspicions. At the same time, he watched to see if and how the duke might have access to her. The result of his investigations was that he found that this could only be the case when he went to the municipal sessions. This was impossible by day, as the duke was not a person who could go unobserved; it must then be in the hours of the night when he slept in town.

He determined to know the truth at once. To that end he announced to his family a few days in advance that a meeting of the Town Council would oblige him to sleep in Sarrio on Friday, for the meeting was an important one, as it was to decide nothing less than the appointment of one of the two doctors of the place, paid by the municipal corporation.

The Maza party had their candidate, and that of Don Rosendo theirs, and the contention was most bitter, not about the votes, which had been perfectly counted the previous day, but because the Cabin party, who had been defeated, had prepared a petition to Parliament to nullify the election of the enemies' candidate, by saying he had not had the months of practise considered necessary by the corporation to make the candidate eligible. The day of the great test found Gonzalo

very upset. He had craftily tried to find out if any servant of the house was a party to the matter, or at least if he knew anything; but he found out nothing which could make him think so. He breakfasted without appetite, and after swallowing his coffee he went off with his father-in-law. The meeting of the Town Council lasted till ten o'clock at night. Then he went home with Don Rosendo, who noticed that his son-in-law was preoccupied and abstracted. Gonzalo excused himself by saying that he was much irritated by the spleen and behavior of Maza's friends. They retired to rest at eleven o'clock, and then, when all was silent, our young man secretly left the house, and took the road to Tejada on foot.

The night was cloudy, but not very dark; the light of the moon shone through the clouds, revealing objects at a short distance off. Gonzalo walked swiftly, with a thick sword-stick in his hand, and carrying a pistol in his pocket.

He felt very sad, and the test he was about to make filled him with mingled fear and remorse. If his wife were guilty, what a tragedy was at hand! And if she were not, he was acting a low part to suspect her honor. He continued his course as furtively as if he were a robber about to break into a house, hiding under the walls along the road when he heard steps, and trembling when he heard a voice, far off as it might be. The

idea that an acquaintance might see him on foot at that time made him ashamed, feeling quite certain that his object would be guessed.

The fresh air seemed to pierce his very bones, although he so rarely felt cold. There was a soft, melancholy sound from the rustling of the wind in the tops of the trees which lined the road like black phantoms. Under one of these he thought he saw a figure, and, fearing to meet anybody who might know him, he jumped into the field; but, looking over the little wall, all that he saw was ruminating and recumbent cows. Then passing a workman's cottage, a window was suddenly thrown open and a woman appeared, which made him take to his heels under the shadow of the trees. As he proceeded on his way he felt a weight at his heart, and a thousand different ideas warred in his mind. He recollected the many delightful details of the first months of his married life: the sweet words and the ostensible proofs of love given him by his wife—his wife whose defects were those of all girls who are too much spoiled—and he began to think that he must be under some cursed hallucination, one of the thousand infamies invented by the enemies of his father-in-law to injure him, and he was on the point of returning to Sarrio and going back to bed when, on thinking over and weighing his grounds for suspicion, the recollection of the duke's departure from the house of

his wife's parents, Ventura's frivolity and flirtations and the veiled yet persistent attack of the inimical journal, fired his blood and urged on his steps. Oh! shame on them if it were true! Better for them if they had never been born! And his hand tightening on the stick, he drew out the sword to make sure it was ready for use. The revolver did not suggest itself to him; he wanted to see and feast his eyes on the blood of the traitors.

When he had covered half the distance to Tejada he suddenly heard behind him the gallop of a horse. Without knowing why, his heart gave a terrible jump, and he quickly leaped into the adjoining fields and anxiously waited, looking over the wall, for the horse to pass by. Before two minutes were over it went by like a flash. He was perfectly able to recognize the duke's chestnut steed; he could not distinguish the grandee himself, as he was enveloped in a cloak, with a large hat drawn over his face; but if his eyes did not see him, his heart saw him with perfect clearness. He stood stunned, rooted to the ground, and he felt a peculiar failing of the legs as if they were going to give way. But the blood soon resumed its healthy circulation in his athletic frame, his iron muscles quickly reasserted their strength, and, without touching it with his hands, he cleared the six-foot wall which enclosed the field. He sprang into the middle of the road, and without an instant's

delay he pursued the horse at a mad, wild speed as if he were silly enough to try and catch up to it. Although he was long-winded, he was out of breath long before he reached the estate, and he had to stop three or four times to recover himself. At last he arrived at the shrubbery and entered by the iron gate, which was only latched. Casting a glance round, he saw the duke's horse tied to a tree. He hastily continued his course, carefully avoiding making any noise, by one of the paths lined with coniferas leading to the house, and, as he knew all the approaches, he did not go to the door—of which he had the key with him—for fear that some servant would hear him, but he climbed by a vine up to the window of his father-in-law's room, which was always left open when he did not sleep at home. Unfortunately, it happened to be closed. Then he drew out his sword, and, putting it in the crack of the window, he raised the latch and thus effected an entrance.

He was, however, seen by one person—Cecilia. On one of the preceding nights she, occupying a room next to that of her sister, thought she heard a noise, and got up. She looked through the window toward the garden and saw Pachin, the servant, with another man she could not recognize. Nevertheless, an awful suspicion filled her with horror. The gait of the man, of whom she could only see the figure, was not that of a peasant. Gon-

zalo was sleeping that night at Sarrio; besides, her brother-in-law was much taller. Dreadfully upset by a terrible idea, she retired to rest again, but not to sleep. All the following day she was sad and preoccupied, and she inwardly determined to watch her sister to know for certain if her thoughts were chimerical or real. So she kept her eye on Pachin, and she noticed that on the very day that Gonzalo was to sleep at Sarrio he was given a commission by Ventura, although he was not the one to make the house purchases. When he returned she wanted to see what he had brought. It was a French novel, which she could not take into her hand, as Ventura seized hold of it and went off to her room. She then had no doubt but that there was a letter between the leaves, and she determined to watch that night and ascertain the truth.

After dinner she sat sewing, while Ventura read by the light of the lamp; and when it struck ten both sisters retired to their respective rooms.

Cecilia threw a cloak over her shoulders, put out the light, and sat by the window. She waited—one, two hours. When it was nearly twelve, she noticed two shadows among the trees, and, albeit with difficulty, she recognized Pachin and the man of the previous night, whom she now saw was the duke.

The two shadows quickly disappeared among the trees round the house. She stood petrified with

horror; a wave of indignation rose in her heart and burst from her lips in the words:

"How infamous! How infamous!"

Then she seated herself on the window-sill, with her face pressed against the pane, as overwhelmed with confusion, shame, and distress as if she were the culprit. At the end of some minutes, standing with her terrified gaze fixed on the park, she saw another figure running with strange swiftness toward the house. She could not repress a cry of horror, and sprang to her feet as if she were worked by a spring; then stumbling in the dark through the furniture, she reached her sister's room, but it was all in darkness. For a moment she thought of calling her, but then she recollected that Ventura could not sin so close to her and her children. A few steps further, on turning the corner of a passage, she saw a light, and ran toward it. In the Persian chamber, of rotunda form, somewhat isolated from the rest of the house, there was a light; and she gave two little knocks at the door, saying through the keyhole:

"It is I, Ventura. Open! Gonzalo is here."

The door was then opened, and Ventura appeared, paler than death. The Duke of Tornos was at the other end of the room, and was turning to the window, with intent to jump out of it. But Cecilia ran toward him, and catching him by the arms, she cried:

"No, not that! It will be no use— Ventura, escape— To the kitchen! Gonzalo climbed up by papa's room."

The girl spoke in an imperious falsetto tone, with her eyes flaming.

Ventura required no repetition, for she precipitately left the room.

Then Cecilia forcibly dragged the duke to one of the sofas, and said:

"Sit down."

The magnate looked at her in stupefaction, and asked:

"Why?"

"Sit down, I tell you," said the girl in a fury, and at the same time putting her hands on his shoulders she pushed him down.

The duke at last sat down, and then Cecilia placed herself on his knees, and, throwing her arms around his neck, she put her lips on his cheek.

At that moment quick steps were heard in the corridor, the door was violently thrown open, and Gonzalo appeared with his drawn sword-stick. Cecilia, turning her head, uttered a cry; and the young man recognizing his sister-in-law, sheathed the arm which he carried, and, hastily reopening the door, he repaired in surprise and confusion to his old bridal chamber.

There Ventura was quietly reading by the light

of a lamp. On seeing her husband before her she rose in surprise, saying:

"What is it? How is it you are here?"

An actress would gladly have bought from her that movement and tone of voice.

Gonzalo was taken aback, and knew not what to say; but he got out of the difficulty by exclaiming:

"Don't you know what scandal is going on in the house?"

"What is going on?" returned the girl, with a face so discomposed that if Gonzalo had been more observant by nature he would have seen that it could not have been solely due to his presence. He shut the door, and said in her ear:

"Your sister is in the Persian chamber with the duke! Don't you know anything about it? Tell the truth," he added, seizing her by the wrist.

Ventura was confounded; she hesitated; she trembled; she lowered her eyes admirably well, and finally said:

"Why should you want me to know, Gonzalo?"

"Don't lie, Ventura!" he exclaimed with a furious gesture; but his heart was filled with immense and infinite relief.

"I am telling you the truth—I know nothing about it—but I suspected something. That is why I was alarmed. When you came in I was think-

ing of going to Cecilia's room to see if she were there."

"How shameful! How scandalous! But this infamy! Some course must be taken—this must be put an end to without anybody hearing of it."

"Yes, yes; but what do you want us to do?"

"I don't know. I will speak to your father—No, not to your father—it would be a fearful blow to the poor man. I will speak to the duke, and we'll see if he resists!"

At that moment they heard a noise in the adjoining room.

"Cecilia has gone to her room," said Ventura. "I will go now and speak to her myself. It will all be put a stop to, and remain a secret. I don't wish you to compromise yourself, Gonzalo mine," she added, throwing her arms around his neck. Gonzalo made a gesture of scorn.

"No, no; I don't want to. It is better for me to speak to Cecilia—wait a minute."

Her husband stopped her as she was leaving the room, and said in a low voice:

"Don't speak cruelly to her. Try and be prudent. It is infamous of him to have thus abused his friendship with the family. What a wretched creature!"

Ventura left the room, and repaired to that of her sister, trembling with alarm. The heroic girl was standing in the middle of the room, with her

arms by her side and her eyes fixed on the ground. Ventura carefully closed the door, and embracing her, she murmured in a tremulous voice:

"Oh, my sister! thank you, thank you!"

But Cecilia roughly repulsed her with a gesture of scornful pride, exclaiming:

"I did it for him, and not for you!"

CHAPTER XXX

A FANCY DRESS BALL AT SARRIO

CECILIA would never do it again—she saw the wickedness of her conduct; she was sorry to have given Gonzalo's enemies ground for insulting his wife's honor, and she had given her word, and solemnly sworn, that those nocturnal meetings would not occur again.

Such was the message that Ventura delivered that night to her husband.

During the succeeding days he showed neither anger nor even severity against the delinquent. All his anger and ill-will were against the duke, whom he accused of having iniquitously abused the confidence of his father-in-law to arouse in poor Cecilia feelings that had hitherto lain dormant. He treated her with kindness, even to indulgence, such as he might have accorded a sick child in the desire to show her that she had lost none of his affection.

But this kindness was so humiliating to her, showing as it did that the man was quite contented in his conviction of her guilt, that she repulsed

it, and in spite of her strenuous efforts to do so she failed to appear grateful for so much generosity.

She shut herself up in her room, without attending as before to the care of the children, and at meal-times she looked so grave and was so quiet that Don Rosendo's notice was attracted, absorbed as the great patrician was in the higher sphere of the battle of thought which was now being waged in Sarrio.

And with his peculiar perspicacity he saw that it was a question of moral and physical weakness proceeding from the monotonous country life. Youth has its own needs, and these must be attended to.

"You are ill, Cecilia. You look pale and sad. You must leave here and live a freer life, in surroundings more befitting young people. We will go to Madrid for a couple of months in the spring. In the country you get asphyxiated like a bird under the bell of a pneumatic machine."

This great thinker occasionally used happy illustrations, drawn, like the present one, from physical and natural science. From the brightness with which the girl concurred with the suggestion he concluded that he had as usual found the key to the matter.

Ventura looked as usual. The terrible scene that had been enacted, the sacrifice of her sister, which she knew had incurred her righteous contempt, had

not affected her. She went on just the same as before, just as careful of herself and careless of others as she had ever been. Nevertheless, whenever she encountered the clear, penetrating eyes of her sister she turned her own away. From the night of the affair she avoided being alone with her, which was very easy, as Cecilia had no wish to exchange a word with the treacherous girl.

Gonzalo feeling quite sure of his wife, reveled in his sense of security, and a recrudescence of affection arose between the couple.

Ventura had made him promise he would never again sleep away from home, and to this he agreed.

Thinking of his sister-in-law's sin, he frequently said to himself:

"The Lord preserve me from still waters, and I will take care of the running ones."

And henceforth he not only pardoned the lightness and frivolity of his wife's vain disposition, which had once so much disgusted him, but came to regard these defects as a guarantee of her fidelity.

"There is nobody without some faults," he would say to himself, "and I would prefer her to have those that are aboveboard."

Five or six days after the event related, "The Youth of Sarrio" published a paragraph, insinuating the same idea as that which had led Gonzalo to make the memorable nocturnal visit to Tejada.

The young man read it without emotion and with a smile on his lips, laughing to himself at the mistake under which his enemies were laboring. Nevertheless, as it was, after all, an insult to have such things written, he determined to chastise its insolent authors, albeit in a matter-of-fact fashion. Therefore at nightfall he abruptly entered the office of "The Youth," when not more than three of the staff were present, one of whom was the traitor Sinforoso Suarez. Without saying a word Gonzalo fell upon them tooth and nail, with so much force and rage that they utterly succumbed to the attack. When one of them did rise from the ground a tremendous blow knocked him down again; and not only were they leveled, but the tables and cupboards were also overthrown, making more noise than an earthquake. When tired of administering this corporal punishment, he quietly left the place, laughing. A few people responded to the cries for help, but he said to them:

"It is nothing, señores; but the managers of 'The Youth' have had a thrashing up there; and, I say, look here! go up and tell those fellows that if they continue with these libels I shall be obliged to send them to prison."

When the facts of the case were known the event caused some commotion. The members of the Cabin were in a frenzy, but Gonzalo inspired such

deep respect, not so much from his position of mayor, but from the terror of his fist, that they at last resigned themselves to overlooking the drubbing administered to their confederates.

The Carnival went by without any great festivity, for Sarrio was no longer the scene of the processions and cavalcades which had once been the talk of the province while converting the town into a miniature Venice. At one time all the inhabitants took part in the great burst of gaiety. The rich not only decked themselves befittingly for the occasion, but they started subscriptions for the importation of gorgeous costumes from Madrid. The cavalcades were incessant and indefatigable in directing showers of almonds, caramels, and aniseed at the windows. The balls at the Lyceum, if not as brilliant, were as entertaining and as bright as those in the most opulent palaces of the court. Oh, the Carnival of Sarrio! Who in the south of the province, where these events took place, will cease to have grateful and tender recollections of it?

But all had changed with the Guelph and Ghibelline-like political strife between the members of the Club and the Cabin. Every one remained in seclusion at home, and the streets were only favored with the sight of some bold mummer, who afforded delight to the crowd of boys in his wake.

The Titanic efforts of Don Mateo were powerless to awake any enthusiasm about balls at the Ly-

ceum. It was in vain that he conferred with the marriageable girls of the place to get promises to help him, which promises were easily gained, but when it came to interviewing papa, he knitted his brows and gravely said:

"Well, we will see, Don Mateo; we will see." And this "we will see" generally signified a prudent abstention. For there might be there Mr. This or Mr. That, with whom the good papa was not on terms of acquaintance.

The previous year Don Mateo had tried to revive the old Piñate ball of glorious renown, known to all good Sarrio folks as the chief feature of the first Sunday in Lent, but the mayor, who was then Maza, under cover of religion and trying to curry favor with the clergy of the town, would not give permission. This year the indefatigable old man returned to the task with increased ardor. Gonzalo made no objection to granting his permission. Then he stimulated the interest of the place to such an extent, by laying stress upon the extraordinary wonders and surprises of the famous globe, ordered from Bordeaux, that he ended by exciting a universal wish to be present that evening at the Lyceum.

So for the first time in Sarrio for several years the salon of the society promised a full attendance. During the days preceding the Sunday the talk and preparations of the young people drowned the dis-

agreeable sounds of politics. It was like a moment's respite for the weary town. Directly Venturita heard that a ball was really in preparation, she ordered from her dressmaker a most magnificent dress to represent Queen Elizabeth of England, and one for Cecilia as a lady of the time of Louis XV. The latter at first declined to go to the ball, but Gonzalo made such a point of it, doubtless to rouse her a little from the melancholy to which she had lately fallen a prey, that she at last gave in, and several afternoons were employed in going to Sarrio, trying on the dresses and giving instructions to the dressmaker.

The longed-for Sunday at length arrived, and Gonzalo, who was very busy all the morning, lunched in Sarrio and returned about dusk to Tejada to dine with his family, and to escort his wife and sister-in-law to the ball.

When he arrived the ladies were dressing themselves in their different rooms, and a little after the usual hour they both appeared in the corridor in their elegant attire.

Cecilia was bright and loquacious, as those of a serious temperament are in moments of excitement; and she seemed to have shaken off the black thoughts that had lately cast such a gloom over her face.

Before taking his seat at table Gonzalo tried some playful jokes with her, as well as with his

wife, and during the dinner he continued to laugh at their expense in his own genial, hearty way.

"Will not your majesty take a little sausage?" he said, addressing his wife. And then, delighted with his remark, he gave vent to a long, loud roar of laughter, like those given by barbarous kings at their festivities, while his enormous frame heaved convulsively.

His healthy, manly spirits were infectious, and no one could help laughing when he started.

Ventura was very amiable that evening, and she tapped her husband on the shoulder and begged him to be quiet, as she could not eat in peace.

When dinner was over and they were taking coffee, either through laughing too much or from some other cause, the young wife complained of indisposition; her dinner had disagreed with her. She expressed a wish to withdraw, retired to her room, and shortly returned, saying that she was not well, and that her head was aching. Tea was made for her, and she lay on the sofa for some time, but the pain and distemper remained.

"Look here! you go to the ball, and I will go to bed," she said, raising her head.

Cecilia, suddenly filled with a suspicion, replied: "No; I will stay, too."

"How silly," exclaimed the invalid, "to deprive yourself of the only entertainment Sarrio has given for some time on such a frivolous pretext!"

"Yes," replied Cecilia with the same gravity; "I shall remain."

"But you know this indisposition hardly causes me any suffering. I am rather bilious; four or five hours' sleep will quite restore me."

"Well, I shall remain."

"Then I shall be obliged to go, ill or not ill," she said impatiently, as she rose from the sofa.

"Ventura is right, bag of bones," said Gonzalo, taking his sister-in-law by the shoulders, and shaking her affectionately. "It is nothing. I have had it a hundred times. Why should you give up going to the ball? Here, here! get your mantilla. Ramon has already put the horses in; it is more than half-past nine," he added, pushing her toward the door. Cecilia could not resist him, but before leaving the room she cast a piercing glance at her sister, who avoided meeting it by resuming her seat. Ramon was, in truth, waiting for them with the family coach. The largest carriage was used that evening, as Don Rosendo and Pablito, who were dining in town, were to return with them in the small hours of the morning. During the drive Gonzalo was still chatty and merry, trying to amuse his sister-in-law, who had resumed her taciturn manner. The young man thought that she was still tormented by the recollection of the fatal scene already narrated, and so made every effort to distract her.

Arrived at the Lyceum, Gonzalo and Cecilia went in, arm in arm, and they crossed a large anteroom, where a crowd of young men made way for them, and greeted them with the familiarity usual in little towns. There were several ladies in the salon, all in fancy dress, although the majority of them, like Cecilia, wore no masks. This was an innovation in Sarrio.

For the last five years the balls at the Lyceum had been dreary affairs. But, thanks to the perseverance of Mateo, the flame of pleasure burst that night into a brightly burning bonfire. The youth of the town entered the empty salon like an overflowing torrent, making the place resound with the bright tones of their talk and laughter.

"Alvara, do you know me? do you know me? Why don't you marry? For you are on the road to old age."

"Periquito, do you like me? Why do you wear a mask? You don't want one. You are not taken with faces, and there you are right. Look here and look there. Eh? Ta-ta, ta-ta, Periquito."

"Hollo, Delaunay! Hollo, monsieur! How goes the aerial tramway? What will you have next? What a long head you have! It is a pity you are so unfortunate. They say you are not a practical man, but you knew how to settle the 'Rat's' daughter. Good-by. Good-by."

"And here's Sinforoso. When are they going to

give you Cipriana's hand? They treat you very badly. Why don't you threaten to go back to the Club?"

It was a party of ladies in black dominoes who cut these jokes, which were at times too strong. The majority of them were old, for the younger ones liked to show their faces and the turn of their figures in some historical costume. There were costumes of Venetian and Roman ladies, costumes of the lower empire, costumes of the time of Louis XV, of the Directory, of Philip II, and others, down to the most recent period. There were also gitanas, necromancers, slaves, and many other fanciful and romantic costumes not admitting classification. There was one representing a starry night, another a tulip, and another a carrier pigeon with a letter at her neck.

The men, as a rule, were not in costume. They wore the long, full frock coat which only came out on such occasions. Nevertheless, some wore a domino, which permitted them to talk to the girls they admired without fear of being interrupted by the mama.

A party of young fellows belonging to the Cabin conceived the happy idea of dressing up Don Jaime Morin as a bib-and-tucker young lady. When dressed up like this they told him that he would be better disguised with paint than with a mask, and he concurred with the suggestion. A

young fellow then took up a box of paints and a brush, and pretending to dip it into several colors, he passed the brush several times over his face, but it had only been dipped in water.

Morin asked to see himself in a looking-glass, but the mischievous youths took good care not to give it to him. They all cried out: "But how capital you are, Don Jaime! How grotesquely you are painted! Your own mother would not know you!" Upon the strength of these words the good Morin allowed himself to be carried off to the Lyceum, where his young friends advised him to joke certain young ladies, to which he replied that his jokes would prove a shock to their nerves. And in effect, no sooner was he in the salon than he cried out to a young lady, in a falsetto voice:

"Hollo, Rosarita! what have you done with Anselmo? We know that you throw him a letter out of the window every night at ten o'clock."

"But, Don Jaime!" exclaimed the girl, looking at him in surprise, "how did you find that get up?"

"The devil! She knew me," said the good Morin, withdrawing. He then turned to another of the fair sex, with the same result. "It is strange," he said at last, "they all know me at once. It must be the voice, because although I am painted with a vengeance—"

He was full of these reflections when a bony hand seized him from behind.

"Great ass! booby! idiot! Who got you up like that?"

It was his beloved spouse, the ingenious, severe, Doña Brigida.

"Get along, stupid! You're always the laughing-stock of every place!" and she pushed the poor fellow out of the salon. The good lady, who was dressed in a domino and mask, went with him as far as the anteroom, where she left him, and returned to the ballroom to carry out her own devices, as we shall see.

Surrounded by a group of dominoes stood the kind Don Feliciano Gomez, whose shining, bald, pyramidical head overtopped the circle of ladies around him as they cracked their insufferable jokes, which sometimes bordered on insults.

"Feliciano, poor fellow! So your sisters let you come to the ball! At what time will they send for you? They say that Doña Petra beats you when you are late; is that a fact? Poor Feliciano! how strict your sisters are! Well, as they did not let you marry, they ought to give you a little more liberty."

The good merchant, without taking offense, gave kind, smiling replies to the harpies, who at last grew tired of his patience, and left him in peace.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF GONZALO

THE charming Pablito, correctly attired in a frock coat, with a white buttonhole bouquet, was meanwhile courting a beautiful Jewish girl, sister of an artillery officer, who had just arrived. The poor girl was overjoyed at seeing at her feet the richest and most eligible young man in the town. What smiles! what meaning looks! The girls of the place cast derisive glances at her, as much as to say: "Enjoy yourself a little, unhappy one; you will soon be disillusioned."

Pablito, as he bent over her in a submissive way, whispered in her ear such ardent and ingenious phrases as:

"As I was coming from Tejada yesterday, I saw you with your father, as pretty as ever."

"What nonsense! I saw you, too. You were driving an open carriage. You drive very well."

"That is flattery, Carmencita. To drive nowadays is nothing. Anybody can do it. If you had only seen those horses when I bought them! One was a caution. It takes about a year to let them

have their head, driving them every day. Don Agapito's coachman nearly spoiled them altogether, especially the handsome one, don't you know, the left-hand one, a little darker than the other; he was quite spoiled. If he had fallen into other hands he would not have been worth more than 2,000 reales now. But now he is better than the other. It is a question of patience, don't you see?"

The beautiful Jewess remonstrated. "Come, don't make light of what we all know you do well."

"Patience and a little practise," repeated Pablito, on a bed of roses. Then he entered full swing on what he considered constituted a good driver: a firm, gentle hand, a quick eye, prompt castigation without loss of temper at any misdemeanor, and a perfect knowledge of horses, for without a careful, thoughtful study of the temperaments of the animals it is impossible to drive systematically.

Carmencita listened, quite entranced. Cecilia had not been long in the ballroom before she was joined by Paco Flores, the engineer, who had asked her in marriage through the mouth of Gonzalo. From the time the girl refused him the young man, who, as we have seen, at first thought only of winning a modest, capable wife with money, fell more in love with her, and became unremitting in his attentions. Self-love always plays a great part in

love, and it is not often easy, even for the individual himself, to distinguish the one feeling from the other.

When it was seen in Sarrio how persistent the engineer was in courting Belinchon's eldest daughter, it was thought that he was only anxious for her dowry; but this was a mistake, for Flores was really in love. If Cecilia had become suddenly poor he would have made her his wife all the same, for her behavior only increased his admiration of her. She always received his attentions and politeness with kindness and gratitude. There was no fear that she would withdraw from the window when he passed by, nor snub him if she met him at any friend's house, nor commit any of those little rudenesses that constitute the delight of the majority of girls.

She treated him like a good friend, and accorded him the kindness due to a person one esteems; but as soon as the engineer wanted to go further, if he asked for a little love, a ray of hope, he was met the next day with the same firm, gentle, persistent refusal. And the worst of it was, Cecilia had no pleasure in refusing, but pain, as it hurt her to disappoint a friend. This feeling was an additional blow to the suitor's self-love.

After dancing a waltz they sat down to rest in a corner of the salon. Flores had taken her fan and was fanning her respectfully.

"I should like to spend my life like this," he said in a sincere tone.

"Oh, you would soon get tired of it," returned Cecilia, smiling.

"Will you try me?"

The girl was silent.

"You are not, Cecilia, one of those women of whom one easily tires. You have treasures in your heart and mind that would always keep the man who loves you at your feet. You have had my heart for more than two years, and instead of wearying I feel myself more and more attached to you. I adore you more and more desperately, to the point of being the laughing-stock of the place."

"That is nonsense," she replied, albeit touched by the fire and feeling that Flores had given to his words. "It is not the same thing seeing a woman a little while now and again, and speaking to her of this and that, as having her continually with you."

"What should I like better, Cecilia, than to have you always with me!" returned the engineer in a low, trembling voice, playing with the fan, with his eyes on the ground. "To consecrate my life to your service, and to adore you on my knees. I know that you would make any man happy, but no one as much as I, for I know the great qualities of your soul, and I divine secret feelings in your

heart quite unknown to others. It is terrible that you will not give me the remotest hope that some day, distant as it may be, my love will conquer you, and you will accept me as a slave."

"I accept you as a friend, as a great friend," said the girl gravely.

"Friend, bah! This friendship, Cecilia, is a stone wall between you and me. I understand that I do not deserve to win your love—that there are a hundred young men in the town who could ask it with a better right; but what is so strange, and what encourages and discourages me at the same time, is that until now you have chosen nobody. Your heart remains empty and indifferent—that is to say, unless you have some hidden love."

Cecilia shivered slightly and raised her eyes a little to the place where the voice of Gonzalo was audible. Then she replied with more severity than usual:

"Cease studying my heart, Flores. In the first place, because it is most probably as commonplace as that of the majority of women, and in the second place, because, if there were something hidden in it, it would not be easy for you to discover it."

"Don't be offended, Cecilia. This study is only a proof of my interest in you."

"I am not offended," replied the girl, trying to smile. "I am going to speak to Rosario. Will you escort me to her?"

In the anteroom, only separated from the ballroom by a few pillars, the grave fathers were chatting and casting pleased looks to where their daughters were disporting themselves. Sometimes a masked lady detached herself from the dancing and came to rally them, and sometimes, being a contemporary, would make them laugh till they coughed, and then brought out some of their old stories.

Don Rosendo was chatting in a corner with Don Melchor de las Cuevas. He was laying before him one of his grand and magnificent projects of which the port was now the object. It is impossible to imagine how much more versed in knowledge Belinchon had become in the last few years, and, as with all great men, it was knowledge more intuitive than studied. At first, when he wrote for "The Light" on any subject of which he was ignorant, he was reticent, vacillating, and timid, but as he grew conversant with the topics of the day, and had at his command a quantity of hackneyed phrases, and, above all, when he possessed an encyclopedic dictionary in fifteen volumes, which did not cost him less than 2,000 reales, he tackled any point with tooth and nail. There was not a subject, or scientific, social, economic, and political problem, upon which Don Rosendo did not undertake to throw some light. If it was a question of the plague which was decimating the

cattle, Don Rosendo sought in his dictionary for the words cattle, horse, bull, sheep, forage, live stock, etc., and as soon as he had read what was said on the subject he took up his pen, and his journalistic genius was brought to bear on the production of one or several articles pregnant with philosophy and erudition.

At the time the question of the port came up, he lost no time in looking in the dictionary for the words port, dockyard, tides, dredges, winds, etc. Seven consecutive articles were written and published to show the necessity of making a dockyard for Sarrio at a spot called Foril. He posed as a consummate seaman, used to navigating the seas and grown gray in the study of hydraulic problems. However, the Señor de las Cuevas, although less eloquent in such a vocabulary of maritime terms, some of which he did not even know, writhed at the wordy explanation given him by Don Rosendo, and ended by clapping him on the shoulder, and saying:

"You can disabuse your mind, Belinchon, about your dockyard. When the wind is in the northeast no sardines come in."

The one who enjoyed the entertainment most was an old man, the good Don Mateo, to whom it was entirely due. To him the ball represented one of the great triumphs of his life. It had cost him more trouble than enough to assemble together

the cantankerous townsfolk. He never stopped all the evening, going, or rather dragging himself, from place to place, giving orders to the servants, the wardens, and the orchestra.

"Gervasio, now for the plates of sweetmeats! Take one down each side, you fellows! What do you want, Señor Anselmo? Do the boys want a polka instead of a waltz? Then let them play a polka. Tell the young men that there are ladies in the dressing-room waiting for partners. Marcelino! where has Marcelino got to? Go down to the porch, for some vagabond has thrown a stone at the lamp and broken it. But, Don Manuel, it is not more than two o'clock! You won't take away the girls yet, and the *piñata* [Jack Horner basket] not yet broken."

The good gentleman was rejuvenated that evening. He shared the pleasure of the young people as mystics rejoice in a general communion. His dark eyes occasionally looked over his spectacles at the wooden globe hanging in the middle of the room, and he gave a chuckle of delight. The beautiful work of art from Bordeaux was painted with blue and white stripes, and there hung from beneath it a quantity of ribbons of various colors, all of which, with one exception, were held by young ladies ready to pull them, and the one who had the ribbon that opened the *piñata* won the globe, which was doubtless filled with sweets, and,

according to report, with very pretty knickknacks. Gonzalo, in the middle of the party, seemed also in good spirits, being sometimes with one lady, sometimes with another. He had danced a polka with his sister-in-law, and a polka and a waltz with two friends of his wife. His tall, colossal form rose like a tower above the heads of all.

"How cheerful you are, señor mayor!" said a lady of the lower middle class.

"One has to profit by Ventura's absence," returned the young man with a laugh. "Where is your husband, Magdalena?"

"Oh, somewhere about."

"Come, dance this polka with me, and let us make hay while the sun shines."

"I can't. I am engaged to Peña for it."

While he was joking with those about him, a woman enveloped in a black domino, with a mask of the same hue, never lost sight of him for a moment, sometimes standing at one spot, sometimes at another, but always at a short distance from him, while her two shining, fiery eyes were visible through the holes of her mask. It was Doña Brigida, the ingenious wife of the spendthrift Morin, who was watching for the right moment, like the baritone in "Un Ballo in Maschera," to strike the blow. The victim in that case was a prince, in this it was only a mayor. The reasons of the eminent lady for meditating this crime would not appear

so weighty as those of the baritone in the eyes of a man, but they certainly would to any woman.

"The Light of Sarrio," in its anxiety to wound all members of the Cabin, with their relations and their friends, had for the last three or four months taken up Morin's wife as a theme. Thus all her domestic secrets were shown up: her married life, the dependence and degradation of Morin were caricatured, while all the anecdotes, more or less funny, that were the current talk of the town, appeared in print, with the addition of several others, discovered or invented by the malignant editors.

And as if this were not enough, there was not a number of the paper in question which did not make mention in some way or other of Doña Brigida's wig, which fact thus became public property in Sarrio. The anger, the rage, the hate, and the desire for revenge which all this aroused in the lady it is impossible to imagine. Suffice it to say that when she met one of the managers of "The Light" in the street she turned livid, and it was only by a great effort that she restrained herself from springing at his throat like a mad cat. Hitherto she had had no opportunity of satisfying this thirst for revenge with which she was consumed. But now, with Gonzalo before her eyes, she was filled with delight, she trembled with eagerness, like a tiger in sight of his prey. Taking advantage of a moment during which nobody was

speaking to him, she came closer behind him, and swiftly placing herself in front of him, she hissed, more than said:

"Gonzalo, why are you so stupid? You are the laughing-stock of everybody. There is not a person in the room who does not know that your wife is this moment with the Duke of Tornos."

The young man was stunned, as if he had received a blow on the forehead; he turned deadly pale, and then made as though he would tear off her mask; but that was impossible, for Doña Brigida had slipped away like an eel among the crowd, and as there were many ladies in the same costume, it was impossible to know which was the one he sought. Then Gonzalo quickly left the room, the words he had heard ringing in his head like hammer strokes. He feared he must fall. In the anteroom he replied with a stupid smile to the remarks made to him; and his uncle, Don Melchor, seeing him so pale, came up to him, and said:

"What is the matter, Gonzalo? Are you ill?"

"Yes; I am going to get a cup of tea."

"I'll go with you."

"No, no; I shall be back directly." And he ran off, leaving his uncle standing at the door.

He descended the staircase, and found himself in the street without knowing what he was doing. The fresh night air cooled his head and revived

his memory. He suddenly determined to go to Tejada. He looked about for the carriage, but not seeing it, he thought Ramon had not left home yet. He looked at his watch; it was only half-past two. He took a few quick steps toward his father-in-law's house, when he recollected he had no hat or overcoat on. Returning to the Lyceum, he told the first servant he met in the hall to bring him down his hat and coat.

Arrived at the house, he found Ramon had already put the horse to the carriage.

"Ramon, drive me as fast as possible to Tejada at once."

The coachman looked at him in surprise.

"Is madame worse?"

"I think so," he replied, getting into the carriage. "But stop at the corner by the mill, you understand?"

"You are afraid of disturbing madame, eh?" queried the coachman with great astuteness. Gonzalo did not reply.

The horses went off at a trot, making the carriage jolt along the stony, uneven road of the town. Gonzalo did not notice how the movement shook every bone in his body, nor the change to the high-road on leaving the town. All his attention was concentrated on one point. Was it true, or was it not?

Strangely enough, without himself knowing

why, the conviction that his wife had deceived him entered his soul and took possession of it. When he went to Tejada on foot, about two months before, he had not wished to harbor this conviction; however much he tried to convince himself that the insinuation of the paper was true, his head and his heart declined to admit the idea. Now it was quite different; he tried to think and to persuade himself that the accusation of the masked lady was only a vile exhibition of the envy and jealousy of some hidden enemy, and yet he could not believe it.

When the carriage stopped he had no idea of the time he had been driving; it might just as well have been a day as a minute. He awoke from his dream, and jumped out of the carriage.

"Now go back for the family," he said to Ramon; "and don't say you have brought me; there is no need to trouble them."

He then turned slowly toward the gate of the park some two hundred feet off, while the carriage went down an opposite road. Arrived at the gate, he pushed it with a trembling hand; it was open, like the previous time. He felt a chill at his heart, which obliged him to stop. He finally entered cautiously, and looked up to see if the key were inside; but it was not there. The night was neither clear nor dark; the sky was overcast, and a fine rain was falling which penetrated to the skin. It

made no sound as it fell upon the trees and bushes of the park, but when disturbed by a gust of wind a quantity of drops came down in a regular gust, which made a quick, passing, ringing sound on the ground.

Gonzalo suddenly recollected that he had no weapon with him; but then he shrugged his shoulders in scorn born of the absolute confidence that in the case of necessity he would not be found wanting. He looked about on all sides to see if he could see the duke's horse, but instead of seeing it he caught sight of the shadow of a man disappearing among the trees; so he ran after him, but he quickly vanished.

He thought it was Pachin, the man-servant, and he then suspected that he was the traitor who had opened the gate to the duke. Ever since the night when he had discovered his sister-in-law with the grandee, his incessant efforts to find out who had helped the duke into the house had been fruitless. He could not have suspected anybody less than such an old servant as Pachin. Then, as he thought that the man might possibly go and warn the traitors, he continued his course toward the house as quickly as possible.

He once more climbed to his father-in-law's room, but this time only as far as the window. Swiftly on tiptoe he automatically turned to the Persian chamber, as if, having met the duke there

once, he must necessarily be there again. Great, therefore, was his surprise to find it dark and deserted. He stood a moment riveted to the spot, but suddenly, struck by an idea, he ran to the room where Ventura slept. The door was locked from the inside. He called out quickly:

"Ventura! Ventura!"

"Who is there?" cried his wife from within in a frightened, strange voice.

"It is I. Open, open directly."

"I am in bed."

"No matter, open at once."

"Let me dress."

"No; open directly, or I'll break the door."

"I am coming! I am coming!"

The young man waited a minute, but instead of the door he thought he heard the window of the room being opened.

"Open, Ventura!" he cried in a rage. And receiving no answer, he gave such a blow at the door with his powerful cyclopean leg that it burst the lock with a loud noise. The room was in darkness.

"Ventura! Ventura!" he cried.

No answer. He struck a match with a trembling hand, and gave a look round the room. His wife, pale and affrighted, was cowering in a corner in her night-dress. Gonzalo turned his eyes from her and looked all round in search of some one, until he noticed the window half open.

Throwing it up and leaning out, he saw something white running under the trees—it was the figure of a man in his shirt-sleeves.

Gonzalo did not stop to climb down from the window; he took a flying leap into the garden, and darted after the fugitive like an arrow. But the man had already reached the iron gate, opened it, and disappeared. Gonzalo was not far behind him, but an instant later he saw him on horseback, under the shadow of the trees, dash down the road in the direction of Nieva.

Inspired, nevertheless, with an insane hope of catching him, Gonzalo rushed back to the stables, took out his beautiful saddle-horse, and putting on a bridle, he jumped on his bare back, and also took the road to Nieva with all speed possible. He had neither spurs nor whip, but the brave animal obeyed his voice, or rather his roars, and went at a furious pace. The eyes of the horse saw the road, but the rider was only conscious of a black abyss, which seemed about to swallow him up, and the old elms that lined the road seemed to fly by like a ghastly procession of phantoms.

On, on, on.

The noble brute flew on as if impelled by a goad for about half an hour.

"It is impossible," said Gonzalo to himself, "that his horse is better than mine. He had at least a start of two gunshots of me!" But just as he was

thinking this, and was hesitating about reining in the horse, he passed by one that stood saddled, but riderless, by the side of the road. He made his own steed halt with some difficulty, and turning back to see what it was, he recognized the duke's English mare.

"Oh," he roared, "now I've got you!" For he thought his enemy must have had a fall. He dismounted and searched the ground, but no rider did he find. Then he said to himself: "Perhaps hearing the gallop of my horse, and fearing that it would overtake him, he has hidden himself somewhere about here."

He then sprang into the neighboring field, and made as careful a search as he could by the light of matches: he looked behind the hedges, he searched the brambles, then he went some way along the bank of a stream on his left, but his box of matches came to an end before he could discover his enemy, so he retraced his steps, mad with rage.

If the Duke of Tornos were hidden somewhere about there, he must have had an anxious time of it.

CHAPTER XXXII

RETRIBUTION

AFTER seeing her husband disappear through the window, Ventura dressed herself quickly and left the room to find a servant. Just at this moment Pachin arrived with a disconcerted face, carrying a light.

"The señorito is rushing after the duke across the garden," he said in a hardly audible voice.

"Will he catch him?" asked the unfaithful wife, very pale, although somewhat recovered from her fright.

"I don't think so; the duke has his horse tied to the Antony vine. He had the start, and, once mounted, it will be impossible to overtake him."

"Where shall I hide myself? If he comes back he will kill me."

"It will be best to leave the house. Come with me."

The girl then followed the servant along the passages, down the back staircase and out by the kitchen door. Pachin wished to take her to the parish priest's house, which was near to the estate.

When they were entering the garden they saw Gonzalo running toward the house, and they only just had time to hide behind the Washingtonia close to the dining-room. From there they saw him go into the stable, bring out a horse and go off full gallop, and Ventura thought she would die of fright.

"No, no; I don't want to go to the priest's house. He will return soon, and the priest could not defend me from him—he is a poor old man— I want to go to Sarrio."

"But, señorita, to Sarrio at this hour, and raining?"

"Is there no carriage?"

"There is the landau, but there are no horses. Wait a bit. I will alter the shafts, and we will harness Señorita, Pablo's mare— I don't answer for her going in it."

"Capital! capital!"

Pachin carried out his idea as quickly as possible. Ventura got into the carriage, and off they went.

Although at first the mare rebelled a little, once on the highroad the thought of the stable at Sarrio, her usual abode, made her go very well.

The girl told the servant to drive her to Don Rudesindo's house, as she was on rather intimate terms with his wife. There she remained until two or three days after the event, when her father took her to Madrid, and from thence to Ocaña, where she was shut up in a convent by the joint

arrangement of Gonzalo and Rosendo. The great patrician, as we know, was not much in favor of positive religions, but "as long as society provided no other coercive measures for certain moral transgressions, he was perforce led to look for them from old social institutions, deficient and vitiated as they might be."

We must now return to Gonzalo. He passed the whole day locked in his room in a state of agitation approaching madness. The only person who ventured to enter his room was Don Rosendo, who talked to him in a kind and dignified style, adorned with periphrases and florid periods befitting his character as a writer. He took a seat by his side and cursed his daughter, "whose inexpressible conduct, defying [Don Rosendo had lately taken a great fancy to this verb] at once morality, law, and social practise, had placed her beyond the pale of all legal and family protection."

It was he who suggested shutting her up for a time in a convent. Poor Gonzalo, overwhelmed and distraught, never answered a word, but listened to him while walking backward and forward across the room with his hands in his pockets and his eyes wet and gloomy. Once only he raised his head to say with firmness:

"Take her where you like—but don't let her see my children. I do not want her lips to touch them."

At dusk a servant came to tell Gonzalo that two gentlemen had arrived in a trap, who wished to see him on urgent business. Guessing immediately the import of the matter he said at once: "Show them in."

Two gentlemen from Nieva then entered. One was the Marquis of Soldevilla, a middle-aged man, quite bald, with a complexion marked with erysipelas, and black teeth. He talked in a loud tone to seem at his ease. The other, named Golarzo, was old, gray, and a man of few words or friends. They came on behalf of the duke to arrange a serious matter that had happened the previous night—about an affair of honor. The duke did not wish to rob the Señor de las Cuevas of the reparation due to him. To run away on such an occasion was not according to his habits nor his character, neither was it befitting his social status. But at the same time, in the interest of Gonzalo and himself, he expected that all would be executed with as much privacy as possible.

Without wincing, and affecting a calmness he was far from feeling, Gonzalo put no check to the loquacity of the marquis, which bordered on impertinence.

"All right," he said, when he had finished. "I accept the challenge, and I am ready to fulfil it when it suits you. But it is rather odd," he added with a nervous laugh, which badly cloaked the

anger which consumed him. "It is rather odd for the señor duke to send the challenge, seeing that I am the injured party. This course seems to me more prompted by fear than by gentlemanliness."

"Señor de las Cuevas," broke in the ex-colonel with acerbity, "we can not permit these derogatory remarks to be made in our presence."

Gonzalo looked at him in an absent way as if he had not heard him, and then continued:

"In fact I could, and even I ought to reject his challenge, because it is not customary for decent men to fight scoundrels, even if they bear the title of king."

"Señor de las Cuevas," exclaimed Golarza, rising in anger from his seat, "this is insufferable, and I will not permit you to speak like this."

"The Duke of Tornos is a scoundrel, and you know he is," he returned, looking him straight in the eyes in a provocative way.

The fact was, it would have required some courage to withstand Gonzalo at that moment. Golarza turned white and, rising, said:

"This is your house, therefore I retire."

"Do you want me to say it to you outside?" he exclaimed impetuously as he also rose from his seat.

"Señores," cried the marquis in his cracked voice, "calm yourselves. Golarza, you have no right to get angry. The sort of injury that our patron has done the gentleman (and I am sorry to

have to refer to it) excuses his want of appreciation of his character. I think from the moment he accepts the duel he has sufficiently atoned for the tone of his remarks, the outcome of the natural anger to which he is a prey."

Gonzalo felt inclined to hurl the table beside him at the fulsome peacemaker; but he stood motionless and silent because of his ardent desire to come face to face with the duke.

The ex-colonel resumed his seat at the entreaty of his companion, and either from spite, or from fear of the young man's irascible state, he did not utter another word. Gonzalo said that he would depute two friends, who would arrange with them the details for their meeting at Nieva in the morning. In the meanwhile they would be returning to the town, unless they would do him the honor of being his guests that night.

The friends of the duke thanked him and proceeded to withdraw. When they were standing ready to go, Gonzalo, addressing himself to the marquis, said:

"I request that your conferences with regard to this duel, and the duel itself, may take place in Nieva—because—" he added in a tone half sarcastic, half tremulous, "strange as it may appear to you, in this house there are people who love me."

The seconds promised to concede to this wish and they then returned to Nieva.

After Cecilia saw them depart she haunted her brother-in-law's door without daring to go in. But coming out in search of Pablito the young man met her in the half-dark passage; when the girl, seizing him by the hand, fixed an imploring look upon his face. She said:

"Do not fight, Gonzalo."

Mustering up the strength to dissimulate, he exclaimed, scornfully:

"I fight with this scoundrel! Never! I will kill him when I meet him."

She believed his words, but she turned to say in a broken voice:

"Don't do it, for the sake of your innocent children."

"For my children and for you," he returned, caressing her cheek affectionately with his hand.

And overcome by emotion he hastily withdrew.

On meeting Pablo he said in a low tone:

"I can speak openly with you; you are a man, and you know that there are things in life that are inevitable. The seconds of the duke have just gone, and I have just deceived Cecilia by promising not to fight. But, as you understand, that is impossible."

"Why?— No, you ought not to fight—I am the one—I ought to kill this wretched fellow," impetuously exclaimed the handsome youth.

"Thanks, Pablo, thanks," returned Gonzalo

gravely, in an unsteady voice, and clasping his hand effusively, "but that can't be. Think a little over the affair, and you will see that your affection and kind wishes lead you astray."

It cost Gonzalo some trouble to convince Pablo that he was the one who should fight the duke first, and his not very fertile brain was much exercised in his search for reasonable and logical arguments in support of this decision.

Pablo only gave in after a long discussion and with the understanding that if Gonzalo were wounded in the duel he should challenge the duke.

There was something in the loyalty and affection shown him by all the family, and in the open and decided way in which they ranked themselves on his side and repudiated the erring daughter and sister, which touched while it overwhelmed him.

This magnanimous conduct obliged him to be generous and not mention the name of the faithless girl in conversation, as he could not do so in measured language.

Pablito was not so reticent, but he saw that it was better not to continue the subject.

"Look here, go early to-morrow to Sarrio and take the letters I will give you to Alvaro Peña and Don Rudesindo. Let them proceed at once to Nieva, trying to keep out of sight as they pass by here. Let them arrange the matter as quickly as possible, and send word to Sarrio about the day

and time. You will get it there, and bring it straight to me. Then I will manage to leave here without letting your father and Cecilia know about it."

Having received his directions Pablo went off on horseback to Sarrio at daybreak to execute them, and Peña and Don Rudesindo at once proceeded to Nieva.

Gonzalo from his bedroom window saw the carriage, in which they were, go by.

As may be supposed, the gossip in Sarrio was terrible. Nothing else was spoken about. The friends of Belinchon looked glum, and there were several who blamed Don Rosendo for having so spoiled his youngest daughter and having put up with her airs and graces of a princess.

The enemies of the patrician were in a state of pure delight and added a thousand particulars to the scandal.

The few impartial people in the place contented themselves with pitying Gonzalo, and censuring the repugnant proceeding of Morin's malicious spouse; for every one knew it was she who had put the match to the train. Many inquisitive people passed in front of Don Rudesindo's house, and gazed eagerly at the windows, and tried to glean from the servants, as they came out, what was going on within. It was said that Ventura was very quiet, and showed little sorrow for her conduct, for

she had dined and joked and laughed with the wife of the cider manufacturer. It was thought that the eager curiosity shown in this quarter would have distracted attention from Don Rudesindo's expedition to Nieva with Peña. But the object of the journey was suspected, and the news ran through the town like wildfire, that Gonzalo was to have a duel with the duke, no one knew where.

Don Melchor de las Cuevas lived alone with a man and a woman-servant. The night of the ball he went home and, calling at the Belinchons, they told him that Gonzalo had gone to Tejada; so, not feeling well, the old man retired to bed without any suspicions.

The following day he still felt indisposed, not being accustomed to late hours, so he remained at home. However, he sent his man to Belinchon's to ask after his nephew, and there the servant heard all that had happened. But not daring to tell his master the news, the servant brought back the message that Gonzalo was all right at Tejada.

That day went by, and on the following, which was Tuesday, the servant heard that the young man was to have a duel with the duke. Then, either fearing to incur responsibility, or because he thought his master could prevent the trouble, he told him the whole story, albeit with some reservation.

Don Melchor, wounded in his tenderest affections, jumped up from his armchair and ordered

a carriage to be fetched at once to take him to Tejada, and when it came to the door he got in, telling the driver to go with all speed to Belinchon's country place. Don Rosendo was the first person he saw, and he received him with some confusion and shame, as if he shared in the disgrace weighing upon Gonzalo. Don Melchor was rather cold to him, not intentionally, but from his desire to see his nephew. Don Rosendo took him to his room door, and there left him. Then the Señor de las Cuevas rapped with his knuckles.

"Who's there?" was sharply asked from within.

Whereupon the old man turned the handle, and went in without answering. Gonzalo, who was standing in the middle of the room, turned as red as fire on seeing his uncle, who clasped him affectionately to his breast.

Copious tears then flowed down the young man's face. Nobody had seen him weep during that trying time, but the old man had been a father to him from his infancy, and he had no shame in revealing to him the most hidden wounds of his heart.

They remained for some time in each other's arms; and Don Melchor at last released his nephew and, pushing him toward an armchair, he said:

"Sit down."

So Gonzalo dropped into the seat and hid his eyes with his hand.

"It is a heavy blow," said the sailor in a hoarse

voice, after a long silence—"a treacherous squall has put your bark under water. But you are a ship of much strength," he added, placing his hands on the young man's herculean shoulders. "You have solid bulwarks—we will weather the storm yet."

Gonzalo made no answer.

"Why did you not come home at once?"

"Because it would have been a cruel slight on this poor family in its deep affliction. They have been so kind to me."

"If that is so, you did well—but you ought to have told me— I don't forgive you for that."

"But why? The later you heard the bad news the better."

"That's not so! I am like your father, Gonzalo, and I can sympathize with you— They tell me you are going to have a duel with him—with that pirate. Is it so?"

"No—no such thing now—" returned the young man with some hesitation.

"Don't deceive me, Gonzalo! This duel can not take place. I have come determined to prevent it."

"There is nothing going on, uncle. Make yourself easy."

"It is useless for you to deceive me. I won't leave you for a moment. Here I will remain, I will sleep by your side so that you don't escape me, and I will keep guard over you from dawn to mid-day and till eve."

Gonzalo stood aghast, seeing that it was necessary to confess all, and to face the matter.

"And if it were true, what of it, uncle? Would you dare to prevent your nephew doing what is exacted by honor?"

"Yes, sir— And don't speak to me of daring!— Yes, sir, I dare," returned the old man in a rage. "Do you want me to give my consent to your losing your life through a villain, a rogue, who crept into your house to villainously betray your honor? Rogues like that are strung up, or shot, one does not fight them. You are blind, Gonzalo. Stop a moment, man, get to the bottom of the scandal and you will see that it does not hold water."

"What would you have me do then? Do you want me to let him go off quietly to Madrid? Do you want me to see him off and wish him a pleasant journey, and thank him for the kindness he has done me?"

"No, he has been curse enough; kill him if you like, but don't lose your own life."

"That is very easy to say, uncle," replied Gonzalo caustically. "Imagine that I go to Nieva, I seek him out, I shoot him, or I kill him with a blow—then I am taken off to prison, and however righteous my cause was, I have to undergo some years' incarceration— Allowing that the majority of men exonerate the deed, they would not think it a very brave one."

Don Melchor stood some moments confounded, not knowing what to reply, but he did not give in. Finally he raised his head quickly, his eyes shining with delight.

"I have found a solution!"

"What?"

"You remain quietly at home. I will go myself to Nieva, meet the duke, and kill him."

"Oh! uncle, many thanks! But it can not be," returned Gonzalo, unable to repress a smile.

"What are you laughing at, silly?" exclaimed the good old man, with his eyes blazing. "You think perhaps your uncle is a useless old hulk, who can not handle a sword or a pistol? The devil take it! the devil!" he added, each time with more anger, and gesticulating about the room like a madman— "I am the same as I was at twenty years of age—I run upstairs four steps at a time without any fatigue—I drink five bottles of pale ale without it getting into my head—I can knock a bull down with a blow, and I can launch a heavy boat. And is all this anything to laugh at, and snap your fingers at in such a brutal fashion?"

"I am not laughing at that, uncle— I know, I know."

"Let's see, then; give me your hand and feel if I can squeeze it or not."

Gonzalo gave him his hand, and the old sailor squeezed it with all his strength, his face red and

contorted. Although not much hurt, the young man feigned most dreadful pain.

"My! my!"

"Eh, well?" exclaimed the uncle with an air of triumph. "Can I or can I not free the world of a villain?"

"I know you can; you are stronger than I. But that is not the question. The thing is to see what is to be done; if it would be right for you or for me. Don't you see, uncle, that the disgrace of being a deceived husband rests solely upon me, and it would be made much, inconceivably, worse, if you fought the duel and not I? I know that this disgrace must be wiped out with blood, but it must be blood shed by my hand."

Don Melchor did not wish to concur in this opinion; he argued, he scolded, and he grew angry. Nevertheless, it was evident that this density was assumed. Gonzalo's arguments began to take effect upon his mind, and filled his soul with bitterness. At last he beat a retreat, only asking for the duel to be postponed, for him to travel for a time, and if on his return he still wished to fight he should do so.

The discussion was still going on when Don Rosendo called outside the door to ask them if they would have luncheon there or come down to the dining-room.

Gonzalo chose the latter course, as he was anx-

ious to show no coldness toward his father-in-law and sister-in-law.

The luncheon was melancholy.

In spite of the efforts made by all, Gonzalo included, to seem unconcerned, a black cloud hung over the party and overshadowed their faces. After taking coffee, and sitting quiet a little while, Gonzalo said:

"Uncle, you left your bed to come here. You can not feel well. Shall a room be got ready for you? I believe you ought to go to bed." Then Don Melchor, seeing that his nephew wanted to be alone, said:

"No; I am going back to Sarrio. Let them put to."

He then took leave of Belinchon and Cecilia, and Gonzalo walked with him as far as the park gate. They were both silent and gloomy; and the old man was extremely pale. Before getting into the carriage, he gave his nephew a long and affectionate embrace, and in a broken voice he said in his ear:

"Strike him between air and water, my boy."

When they parted, his face was bathed in tears, and, getting into the carriage, he hid himself in a corner unable to say good-by.

Gonzalo looked after the vehicle and stood for some time motionless, holding by an iron bar of the gate.

Pablito returned from the town early in the evening. After dinner, he found an opportunity to say quickly to his brother-in-law:

"To-morrow at eight at Soldevilla's place. Pistols. Peña and Don Rudesindo will go by here at six. Be ready."

Gonzalo slept that night better than the previous one. The fierce satisfaction of the certainty of meeting the duke the following morning calmed his nerves.

At five in the morning he awoke active and fresh with no recollection of dreams. He dressed himself and sallied forth, with as little noise as possible, on tiptoe as dawn was breaking.

"Are you going shooting, sir?" asked a servant whom he met.

"No, I am going to see the miller, to have the canal kept low, as I want to fish this evening."

He passed on to the road, and went in the direction of Nieva, waiting for the carriage with his seconds to catch him up, which it did in about half an hour. Peña and Don Rudesindo were much excited. When the young man entered the carriage they shook hands with great warmth and acquainted him with the conditions of the duel—they were to have twenty paces between them, and to advance and retreat as they pleased. This affair was by far the most serious one they had taken part in.

Gonzalo listened quietly; and he merely mentioned that he would have preferred swords, as he would have liked to have been nearer to his enemy. He did not seem upset, for the fact was, the excitement of meeting his foe face to face was an agreeable change from the torment of the preceding days, when the picture of his wife, in her night-dress, cowering in a corner, never left his mind's eye.

Besides, Gonzalo, like all those of an excessively vigorous temperament, was born for dangers; he reveled in them as if he were certain that the life coursing through his veins was inexhaustible. They did not reach the Soldevilla estate before half-past eight. The duke and his seconds had been waiting for some time. The former was not visible, being within the house. The marquis and Golarza escorted Peña and Don Rudesindo indoors, while Gonzalo took a turn in the garden. The Soldevilla place consisted of an old house half in ruins, with scanty, very old furniture, covered with dust; a rather large garden, more cared for than the house, and behind the garden an old orchard. The place was surrounded by meadows and lands, also belonging to the marquis.

The seconds discussed in the house whether the pistols brought by Peña, or those of the duke, should be used, and they decided upon those of the latter. Then the conditions of the duel were

written out with a very bad pen of the major-domo's, for the marquis only wrote about one letter a year there. The pistols were loaded, and they sallied forth to seek a convenient spot for the combat.

"Manuel," said the marquis, seeing a man busy planting onions in one of the garden beds, "go away."

The servant looked at him in surprise.

"Be off, man," he reiterated with increased severity. "Go somewhere else."

The servant then left the garden, casting looks of astonishment and curiosity behind him.

A place was chosen in one of the narrowest paths in the centre of the garden, and Soldevilla went to fetch the duke.

Dawn broke that day in a clear sky; but very early after sunrise heavy, dark clouds gathered over that part of the coast, threatening an early discharge of heavy rain.

The light grew dimmer and dimmer to an extraordinary degree until it waned to a misty gray.

The duke appeared in a black frock coat and broad-brimmed hat, rather paler than usual, but affecting a calm disdain, coupled with his usual courtesy. He had a fragrant cigar in his mouth with which he enveloped himself in light clouds of smoke as he walked by the side of Soldevilla.

Arriving at the appointed spot he gave a cold

ceremonious greeting to the group of Gonzalo and his seconds, and vouchsafed them no further glance. After a few minutes' conference Peña put Gonzalo in position and handed him a loaded pistol. Soldevilla did the same with the duke. They had both removed their hats. The grandee retained his cigar in hs left hand, and, with an impassibility which savored of the theatrical, he gave long puffs at it. Great drops of rain, heralding a sharp shower, began to fall; and Peña finally called out:

"Gentlemen, are you ready? One, two, three! —fire!"

The duke inclined his pistol and aimed. Gonzalo, also aiming, came forward with a pale face and with his eyes starting with fury.

His opponent waited until he arrived within fifteen paces with calmness, and moreover with the certainty of victory, for he was a consummate shot, and then fired.

The ball grazed the young man's cheek, piercing his skin and making it bleed; he stopped an instant, and then continued advancing. The seconds turned terribly pale. The duke dropped his pistol and stood awaiting his death with a bravery tinged with affectation and pride.

Gonzalo came forward precipitately until within two steps from his adversary. At that moment a rush of blood blinded him; his athletic tempera-

ment overcame his reason, his eyes shone with the glaring look of a wild beast, his lips trembled, his face contracted in a fearful manner, and, casting the pistol far from him, he leaped upon the traitor like a tiger. The duke, unable to resist the shock of the Colossus, was leveled to the ground. Then, roaring with rage, Gonzalo proceeded to kick him in the ribs. The seconds rushed to stop him, and the choleric Golarza caught him a blow on the head, to which Gonzalo seemed quite oblivious. Peña, indignant, raised his stick and directed a blow at Golarza. The Marquis of Soldevilla then gave another to Peña; and the whole party, mad with fury, began a hand-to-hand fight, while Gonzalo, satiating his pent-up thirst for vengeance, reveled in pummeling the well-nigh inert form of the duke.

At that moment the clouds burst in a downpour of rain, which became so heavy that the Marquis of Soldevilla quitted the field and repaired to the house for shelter.

The circle broke up as if by magic, for Don Rudesindo and Peña and Golarza followed his example.

However, before going off, it occurred to them to look and see how their chiefs were getting on.

And by a unanimous movement of compassion, they seized hold of Gonzalo, whose mad rage was not yet exhausted.

The grip of the gentlemen brought him back to reason. He gave one long, sinister, astonished look, and then, without saying a word, he seized his hat and turned to the gate of the estate, while the duke was carried to the house in a dying condition.

The doctor summoned by Soldevilla (he had been shut up in a room during the duel, so as to avoid being present) now made a careful examination of the wounds and contusions of the injured man, and then declared his condition very serious.

Peña and Don Rudesindo found Gonzalo in the carriage weeping in despair.

"I am a brute!" he said—"a brute! What will you think of me? I have committed a shameful deed. Forgive me."

The friends did their best to calm him. In truth neither of them was so shocked; for, after all, the conduct of the duke had been so villainous that it deserved a villainous chastisement.

Peña during the drive even cut jokes on the splendid trouncing administered to the grandee.

"There is no doubt, my boy, that grandees of strength can do more than grandees of rank," he said in his bell-like voice, enunciating every letter.

Gonzalo, like a great child that he was, passed from crying to laughing, and after the first smile he gave long and loud guffaws at his friends' jokes.

But the sight of his father-in-law's house

plunged him again into depression. He had satisfied his righteous anger, but there remained a deep wound, of the anguish of which he had not yet been conscious, as long as it had been stifled by the excitement of the rage which had consumed him during those two days. Oh! those grotesque little towers and minarets, witnesses of his honeymoon; they made him so melancholy that it seemed as if some cruel hand were clutching at his heart within his breast. His friends, divining his wish to be alone, went on to Sarrio. Pablito was waiting for him at the house gate, and embraced him effusively and enthusiastically.

"Have you killed him?" he asked in a low voice.

"I don't know—I think so," returned the young man in a still lower tone. "And your father?"

"My father—he was here an instant ago—as soon as he saw you get out of the carriage safe and sound he got into the landau, which was waiting, ready, and went off to Sarrio."

Gonzalo guessed the purport of Don Rosendo's journey, and his gloominess increased.

The two brothers-in-law then proceeded in silence to the house, and straight up to Gonzalo's room.

At the end of some moments, after throwing himself on the sofa and remaining motionless with his head sunk on his chest, he said to Pablito:

"Forgive me, Pablo—but I want to be left alone, I am not equal to talking now."

So the brother-in-law withdrew.

At the end of some time, the door was reopened without the young man noticing it, and a shadow slipped toward him and placed upon the nearest chair a tray with a cup and some plates.

"Oh, is that you, Cecilia?"

"Whether you like it or not, you must take something, for I am certain you have not broken your fast," said the girl, dragging a little table forward and placing the steaming soup upon it.

"How good you are, Cecilia!" he exclaimed, seizing one of her hands. That exclamation was a cry of affection and enthusiasm, mingled with remorse that he had ever been able to doubt her.

"How good you are! How good you are!" he repeated with tears in his eyes. "What you did that night! Oh! Nobody else would have done it, nobody else! A saint descended from heaven would not have done it—none of those living about you are worthy to kiss the dust from your feet."

And the young man, moved by his own words, sobbed bitterly while covering the hand he held with tears and kisses.

Cecilia, after turning first deep scarlet and then pale, said in a somewhat cold and distant tone:

"Let go, let go," and at the same time quickly

withdrew her hand. Seeing that her brother-in-law was somewhat hurt, she hastened to add:

"Look here, the less we talk of these things, and, if possible, the less we think of them, the better. The thing is now for you to take the soup. Then I will bring you some biscuits and a sandwich—you will like that?"

"I have no appetite, Cecilia," he replied, making an effort to control his emotion.

"You must try—"

"No, no; really I can not swallow anything just now."

"But if I ask you?" said the girl, and as she spoke a flush suffused her face.

"Then, well then, I'll take it—nobody can refuse you anything," he replied, taking the cup.

That gallant reply had a painful effect on Cecilia, and to avoid it being noticed she quickly left the room.

The Duke of Tornos lay for two or three days between life and death. But finally the fever left him, and the danger was over, although the recovery was very long, because he had two ribs and a jawbone fractured, besides terrible contusions in various parts of his body.

At the end of a month he was able to be moved to Madrid.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE FINAL TRAGEDY

GONZALO did not leave his father-in-law's house; and at the end of five or six days after the duel, Don Rosendo returned from taking Ventura to the Ocaña Convent. But his life was sad and depressed. He declined Pablo's persuasions to go shooting or walking, and the thousand pretexts made by his father-in-law and his friends, who came to see him at Tejada, to induce him to get out, proved fruitless.

Although Gonzalo did not openly refuse to accompany his friends, he managed to elude them and remained at home, where he sat alone.

His uncle, Don Melchor, came to see him, and advised him to travel for a time; Gonzalo did not reject the idea, but he always postponed it on the pretext of want of health.

Don Rosendo, upon the advice of Las Cuevas and other friends, decided to move to Sarrio to see if the society of acquaintances might not cheer the young man up a little. But all attempts to rouse him proved failures. Gonzalo let himself be taken to town without offering any objection, but he

continued just as anxious to be alone, and to live retired from social life.

He only went out early in the morning and took a few turns at the end of the landing-stage, where he contemplated the sea with far-away eyes, sometimes so full of sadness that they would have alarmed any onlooker. As soon as the place became frequented, and the town awoke from its sleep, he hastily returned home.

Why did he not leave Sarrio, the scene of his troubles, and go for a time to Madrid, Paris, or London? This was the question asked by all the people of the town, without receiving any satisfactory answer, nor was it easy for one to be found. There are very few competent to explain the secret origin, the final cause of human actions, because very few study psychology, deeming it useless, and those who are endowed with an understanding, both subtle and perspicacious, devote it solely to the study of self-interest, so that hardly anybody sounds this magic casket of feelings, desires, hopes, and contradictions called the human heart.

How ashamed Gonzalo would have been if any one had told him that he did not leave Sarrio because he did not wish to quit the place associated with his wife, whom he still adored in secret, while feigning to hate her before the world! And nevertheless it was certainly so. As long as he remained in that house, all the bonds uniting him to her did

not seem to be broken. The people about him were of her flesh and blood; they loved her still, culpable as she was, and they did not abuse her in his presence.

Ventura seemed to have left part of herself in the rooms and in the furniture; the bottles of essences and pots of pomades still stood half-used on the dressing-table; some of her cloaks and hats were still hanging on the pegs, and it seemed as if her fair, sunny head might appear at any moment from behind the curtains, while the air was still sweet with her favorite perfume. The husband, who had been disgracefully outraged, inhaled with delight this atmosphere of his wife, and lived in the shadow of her life, unwilling as he would have been to acknowledge it; and he lived, moreover, in the hope of one day pardoning her. This nobody knew—he had probably not formulated it to himself—nobody knew it but Cecilia, whose eyes, sharpened by love, divined her brother-in-law's most secret thoughts; and he evinced such an affectionate, enthusiastic, venerating feeling for her that it might easily have been confounded with love. Everybody's companionship, even that of his uncle, bored him more than hers.

However cast down he was with sad thoughts, which made scalding tears flow down his cheeks, the appearance of Cecilia in his room had a calming, soothing effect upon his grief.

He followed her counsels with respect, and let himself be guided and coaxed by her like a sick child. When she delayed coming to him he grew impatient and made tender complaints about it, as if he had been a devoted lover.

When she was in the room his eyes never left her for an instant, so great was the influence of the charm or fascination she exercised on him; those eyes expressed deep affection, admiration, respect, enthusiasm; expressed, indeed, everything but love.

Cecilia read it all, but she could not see it without feeling the old pain and bitterness. Her gentle spirit was occasionally momentarily disturbed, and she seemed at times cold, irritable, and enigmatical, to the great surprise and sorrow of Gonzalo, who tried to cheer her up, and that with success. For the sad thought had had the same effect upon her mind as the fall of a stone on the peaceful waters of a lake, but, like the lake, her mind soon regained its purity and tranquillity.

One day, on suddenly entering the room of her brother-in-law, she found him examining a revolver.

When he saw her he turned red, and tried to hide it in the table drawer, which was open.

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing; looking for some papers in this drawer, I came across this revolver, which I did not know I had, and so I am looking at it."

Cecilia did not believe what he said, and the anxiety caused her by the incident made her keep a stricter watch on him.

Two months went by. Although the young man still persisted in his isolated, gloomy sort of life, there were a few faint signs of improvement. Once or twice he went out on horseback, and he talked to his father-in-law of going to Italy, as he had never been there.

The fresh impulse given to his depressed being was due to a pleasant thought, as pleasant as it was deceptive, and which he carefully kept from everybody.

Nevertheless, one night, on taking an affectionate leave of his sister-in-law, when retiring to rest, after much circumlocution and turning crimson, he asked after Ventura.

"What news is there of her?"

Cecilia gave him a chilly answer in as few words as possible.

Poor Gonzalo! If he had known that the treacherous wife, after whom he was asking, far from repenting, was furious against her family, covering them all with opprobrium, and threatening to go off with the first man at hand as soon as she came out of retreat, and shocking the Superior of the Convent with her language and pride.

From that day Gonzalo lost his aversion of re-

ferring to his wife, asking sometimes after her, and liking to mention her in conversation, but Cecilia still maintained the cold tone of her replies, quickly changing the subject.

What Don Rosendo had feared from the letters from Ocaña at last happened.

The Superior of the Convent informed him one day that Ventura had escaped from the retreat, and, according to all reports, it was with the Duke of Tornos.

"The great humanitarian" (as he was termed by "The Light," on a certain occasion) received the news with stoical fortitude. In fact, what did any purely individual sorrow signify in comparison with universal sorrow in the slow and sure march of humanity to its destiny? He had recently read a celebrated pamphlet called, "The March of the World," from the pen of a French writer, and, with his brain refreshed and illuminated with its grand historical synthesis, he found strength to bear the blow.

Nevertheless, he tried to keep the news from his son-in-law, as he had not the same confidence in the loftiness of his spirit and the width of his views. It was therefore kept secret for some days, but suddenly it became current news in the town, without any one knowing who started it. Gonzalo, who always went early in the morning to the Club, read it in a paragraph in "The Youth of

Sarrio," which was as infamous as it was hypocritical.

"It is said in the town," it ran, "that a lady, the heroine of a certain romantic drama, enacted not long ago, has fled with her lover from the asylum in which her family had secluded her. We shall be sorry if this report be true, as it will affect certain persons who are well known and much esteemed in Sarriensan society."

Gonzalo felt that his heart was broken—the last ray of hope was gone.

He let the paper fall, and with a nervous smile, and in a strange, sharp voice, said to old Feliciano Gomez, who was the only person present:

"Do you know that my brute of a wife has gone off with her lover?"

Don Feliciano looked at him in surprise, for, although little versed in smiles, he was taken aback at seeing the young man smile like that, and he replied sadly:

"Yes, Gonzalin; yes, I knew that it wasn't all over so soon— But, really, after what happened, this final blow ought not to cause you surprise. Once the rein is broken you can always imagine what will be the end."

"And what for me. What—?" exclaimed the unhappy man, with the same smile, which expressed the ill-restrained excitement of body. "Let her go— Very well! let her go with God's

blessing. I have nothing against it— Ah! if the law only permitted me to marry! A month would not elapse without my doing so— And why not? we will see, and why can I not do so? Anyhow, if I can't marry for good, I can take up with somebody. I will carry on with some pretty girl, eh, Don Feliciano? And the devil take the rest!—for if she be bad by profession, my wife is so from choice."

While making these ugly remarks, he walked up and down the room, threw off his hat, shrugged his shoulders, and gesticulated wildly.

Finally he roared with laughter.

"Look here, Gonzalin," said Don Feliciano; "you have just weathered a storm; better weather is in store. There is always good after bad. The things of the world have to be taken easily, my dear. What is the good of putting one's self out, and upsetting one's digestion? Look at me. Last month I lost a ship. Everybody came to condole with me, thinking I must be in despair, and I said to them:

" 'It is true I lost the "Juanita," but if I had lost the "Carmen," wouldn't it be much worse? for it might have been the one as much as the other, as both were afloat.' You have had a great blow—but keep up. Would it not be much worse if you were ill? You must think of that, my boy. Health is the first thing—you eat well, drink well, and

those are the first things; the rest will all come right."

Gonzalo left the club without taking leave of the good Feliciano, who was still speaking.

At home he told Don Rosendo of Ventura's flight, and, contrary to everybody's expectation, he did not seem to feel it much. On the contrary, from that day he showed signs of cheering up, and of going a little into society, which caused some surprise in the place.

He began paying visits to his friends, going out to coffee, walking in the streets, joking and discussing. There was no more talk of going away. To the astonishment of the town, at one of the balls of the Lyceum, he danced all night like a young fellow at his first dance.

Nevertheless, Cecilia was very anxious. The animation of her brother-in-law was so strange, that it seemed more like an attack of nerves. Above all, this strange smile seemed like a grimace that had not left his lips since reading the paragraph in "The Youth of Sarrio," and it sometimes made her shudder.

The natural reaction came: after the days of insane excitement, he became a prey to a profound and gloomy depression. He remained three days in his room, hardly touching anything that Cecilia brought him, and, what was worse still, without being able to sleep. With open, vacant eyes, he

passed hours and hours stretched on his bed gazing into the dark.

On the third night he struck a light, dressed himself, wrote a long letter to his uncle, and one to Cecilia. When they were sealed, and laid on the table so as to be easily seen, he took out a Havana and, after lighting it at the candle, began walking up and down the room.

Before finishing the cigar he threw it away, opened the table-drawer and drew out the revolver which he kept there. On taking it to the light, he saw it was unloaded, which fact surprised him, because he was certain he had loaded it about a month before. What a strange thing! Then he recollected that Cecilia had seen it in his hand, and a smile wreathed his lips. He then took up the cartridge box, and found it empty; the cartridges were all gone!

He stood pensive and motionless for some time. Then, as if awakening from a sleep, he shook his head and gave a sigh. After this, he put on his hat, opened the door, and very cautiously descended the staircase. On passing the door of the first floor he put his ear to it, and stood listening for a moment with his face convulsed and his hair on end. He thought he heard the voice of his wife calling him from within.

The hallucination having passed, he descended the stairs, opened the outside door with the key

hanging in the passage, and passed into the street.

It was not yet dawn, but in the east there was a little line of light that heralded the day. The morning was fresh, a sea-mist of fine rain was falling. He walked to the harbor without any hesitation, mounted the upper wall and looked out to sea, the horizon not being very extensive just then owing to the fog.

A northeast wind had been blowing for the past few days, which had made the sea very rough. Great, grand waves came rolling in from a distance, and dashed their gigantic forms against the end of the mole, and the foam flew straight up.

The eyes of the young man were soon directed to a launch about to enter the harbor, as it danced like a walnut shell upon the waves. Its entrance interested him, and he followed all its peripatetics with as much attention as if he were concerned in it.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, when the entrance to the harbor was effected, his thoughts resumed their course, and sighing and murmuring "Come," he went forward and leaned against the wall. As the tide rose higher, a larger wave than the rest drenched him with its foam. The unexpected bath was agreeable to him, as it refreshed him physically. He stood waiting for some time to see if another would come with equal force, but none came, so he continued his walk.

Arriving at the end of the mole he threw himself down on the mole and fixed his melancholy gaze on the waves coming in.

It was the same spot where, a few years previously, he had had the conversation with his uncle about breaking off his engagement with Cecilia and marrying Ventura.

The stern, severe words of the old man seemed now to reecho in his ears:

"God can not help the man who breaks his word. The journey is long, the sea wide and powerful, and what is merely pretty is soon submerged in the swell."

"How right my uncle was!" thought the young man, without turning his eyes from the sea.

"Bah!" he muttered at the end of a few minutes, "if I had been a hundred times in the same position I should have done the same. There are fatalities. That woman has inoculated my blood with poison which can only be ejected with its last drop."

He stood some time again lost in thought. The sea water, which had immersed him, and the rain, which still incessantly fell, chilled him to the bone. The morning dawned damp and foggy. It was not like that beautiful night when, after talking with his uncle, he had then also been plunged in thought. Then the magnificent splendor of the heavens spangled with stars, the crystal clearness

of the water, in which the light of the moon was reflected, and the soft breeze whispered to him of death—yea, but it was in sweet, harmonious, friendly strains, like the voice of a friend calling him to rest. But now it was as if he heard a cry of desolation, a threat: "Come, come, death is very sad, but life is the saddest of all!"

"We must make an end of this," he said, raising his head. He moved forward and stretched out his arms.

But at the moment, fearing that the instinct of self-preservation would certainly make him swim, he stopped.

He looked all round in search of some weight, and his eyes fell upon the anchor of a smack, which lay below on the lower wall. He jumped down, seized it, cut a piece of rope from a launch with his knife, lashed it to the anchor, and, like a gymnast anxious to exhibit to the public the prodigious power of his muscles, he scaled the steps with his burden. Once there he tied the cord to his neck, put his foot upon the wall, and, with the anchor in his arms, he precipitated himself into the deep. His colossal form made a great vacuum in the waters, which closed immediately over him. The deep sea extinguished that spark of life with the same indifference as it had so many others.

A sailor, seeing him from a distance, ran crying:

"A man in the water!"

Three or four others from boats at hand followed, and in a few minutes there was a crowd of twenty or thirty at the end of the landing-stage.

"Who was it? Do you know him?" was asked of him who had seen him.

"I think it was Don Gonzalo."

"The mayor?"

"Yes."

"Very likely, very likely— Oh, these women!"

The news spread rapidly through the town, and a crowd of people hastened to the port. Two men in a boat prodded with a pole in the water's depths, without encountering the body of the unhappy young man. At last they came across it, and with the help of a hook they brought it to light, just as Melchor, upset, excited, and hatless, arrived at the port to receive the terrible blow.

"Son of my heart!" cried the poor old man when he saw his nephew's body in the water; then utterly collapsing, he fell unconscious into the arms of the people about him.

The corpse of the suicide was laid in the town hall awaiting the arrival of the justice of the peace, and the spectacle made a profound impression upon the bystanders, who numbered among them persons from the rival parties.

After the arrival of the justice of the peace, due instructions were given and the body was

placed on a truck and carried to its home, as Don Rosendo claimed it on hearing the news. It was a very sad procession that passed through the town; the people crowded the windows with pale and sad faces, for Gonzalo was a universal favorite.

Don Rosendo was overwhelmed with grief, and, not wishing to see the corpse of his son-in-law, he shut himself in his room, but he gave orders to have the body placed in the best drawing-room on a table covered with velvet, and flowers and wreaths to be sent from all parts, and preparations for a grand funeral to be made.

Cecilia, with one of those heroic efforts over body and mind which characterized her, managed to bury her grief in the depths of her own heart. She was seen looking livid, but tranquil, going about the house, doing what was necessary for the reception of her brother-in-law's body. When it arrived she herself helped to arrange it after it had been shrouded in its winding sheet. She covered it with flowers, she lighted the candles, and she draped the room with black. Then she arranged for a Sister of Charity to share the watch by the corpse with herself.

At last they were left alone. They prayed for a long time on their knees; and when the orisons were over, Cecilia asked the Sister to go to the kitchen to order tea, as she was quite faint.

As soon as the Sister left the room, Cecilia rose

quickly, drew out a pair of scissors, cut a lock of her brother-in-law's hair and hid it in her bosom; then she cut a tress from her own head, and, trembling with agitation, she placed it between the crossed hands of the dead man.

Then, after gazing at him for an instant, she lowered her head and covered the inanimate face with kisses—the first and the last that she ever gave him.

Then the wife, the man's true and only wife, powerless to cope with such a sorrow, fell senseless to the ground.

THE END

MARIQUITA THE BALD

A Tale After the Style of an Old Chronicle

By JUAN EUGENIO HARTZENBUSCH

MARIQUITA THE BALD

IT is as sorry a matter to use the words of which one ignores the meaning as it is a blemish for a man of sense to speak of what he knows nothing about. I say this to those of you who may have the present story in your hands, however often you may have happened to have heard *Mariquita the Bald* mentioned, and I swear by my doublet that you shall soon know who Mariquita the Bald was, as well as I know who ate the Christmas turkey, setting aside the surmise that it certainly must have been a mouth.

I desire, therefore, to enlighten your ignorance of this subject, and beg to inform you that the said noted Maria, Mariquita being the diminutive of this name, was born in the District of Segovia, and in the town of Sant Garcia, the which town is famed for the beauty of the maidens reared within its walls, who for the most part have such gentle and lovely faces, that may I behold such around me at the hour of my death.

Maria's father was an honest farmer, by name Juan Lanas, a Christian old man, and much beloved, and who had inherited no mean estate from

his forefathers, though with but little wit in his crown, a lack which was the cause of much calamity to both the father and the daughter, for in the times to which we have attained, God forgive me if it is not necessary to have more of the knave than of the fool in one's composition.

Now it came to pass that Juan Lanas, for the castigation of his sins, must need commit himself to a lawsuit with one of his neighbors about a vine stock which was worth about fifty maravedis; and Juan was in the right, and the judges gave the verdict in his favor, so that he won his case, excepting that the suit lasted no less than ten years and the costs amounted to nothing less than fifty thousand maravedis, not to speak of a disease of the eyes which after all was over left him blind.

When he found himself with diminished property and without his eyesight, in sorrow and disgust he turned into money such part of his patrimony as sufficed to rid him of the hungry herd of scriveners and lawyers, and took his way to Toledo with his daughter, who was already entering upon her sixteenth year, and had matured into one of the most beautiful, graceful, and lovable damsels to be found throughout all Castile and the kingdoms beyond. For she was white as the lily and red like the rose, straight and tall of stature, and slender in the waist, with fair, shapely hips;

and again her foot and hand were plump and small to a marvel, and she possessed a head of hair which reached to her knees. For I knew the widow Sarmiento who was their housekeeper, and she told me how she could scarcely clasp Mariquita's hair with both hands, and that she could not comb the hair unless Maria stood up and the housekeeper mounted on a footstool, for if Maria sat down, the long tresses swept the ground, and therefore became all entangled.

And do not imagine, her beauty and grace being such, that she sinned greatly in pride and levity, as is the wont of girls in this age. She was as humble as a cloistered lay-sister, and as silent as if she were not a woman, and patient as the sucking lamb, and industrious as the ant, clean as the ermine, and pure as a saint of those times in which, by the grace of the Most High, saintly women were born into the world.

But I must confide to you in friendship that our Mariquita was not a little vain about her hair, and loved to display it, and for this reason, now in the streets, now when on a visit, now when at mass, it is said she used to subtly loosen her mantilla so that her tresses streamed down her back, the while feigning forgetfulness and carelessness. She never wore a hood, for she said it annoyed her and choked her; and every time that her father reproached her for some deed deserving of punish-

ment and threatened to cut off her hair, I warrant you she suffered three times more than after a lash from the whip, and would then be good for three weeks successively; so much so that Juan Lanas, perceiving her amendment, would laugh under his cloak, and when saying his say to his gossips would tell them that his daughter, like the other saint of Sicily, would reach heaven by her hair.

Having read so far, you must now know that Juan Lanas, the blind man, with the change of district and dwelling did not change his judgment, and if he was crack-brained at Sant Garcia, he remained crack-brained at Toledo, consuming in this resort his money upon worthless drugs and quacks which did not cure his blindness and impoverished him more and more every day, so that if his daughter had not been so dexterous with her fingers in making and embroidering garments of linen, wool, and silk, I promise you that this miserable Juan would have had to go for more than four Sundays without a clean shirt to put on or a mouthful to eat, unless he had begged for it from door to door.

The years passed by to find Maria every day more beautiful, and her father every day more blind and more desirous to see, until his affliction and trouble took such forcible possession of his breast and mind that Maria saw as clear as day-

light that if her father did not recover his sight, he would die of grief. Maria thereupon straightway took her father and led him to the house of an Arabian physician of great learning who dwelt at Toledo, and told the Moor to see if there were any cure for the old man's sight. The Arabian examined and touched Juan, and made this and that experiment with him, and everything was concerted in that the physician swore great oaths by the heel-bone of Mohammed that there was a complete certainty of curing Juan and making him to see his daughter again, if only he, the physician, were paid for the cure with five hundred maravedis all in gold.

A sad termination for such a welcome beginning, for the two unhappy creatures, Juan and Maria, had neither maravedi nor cuarto in their money box! So they went thence all downcast, and Maria never ceased praying to his Holiness Saint John, and to the patron saint of our country, his Holiness Saint James, to repair to their assistance in this sad predicament.

"In what way," conjectured she—"in what way can I raise five hundred maravedis to be quits with the worthy Moor who will give back his sight to my poor old father? Ah! I have it. I am a pretty maid, and suitors innumerable, commoners and nobles, pay their addresses and compliments to me. But all are trifling youths who only care for love-

making and who seek light o' loves rather than spouses according to the law of the Lord Jesus Christ. I remember, notwithstanding, that opposite our house lives the sword-cutler, Master Palomo, who is always looking at me and never speaks to me, and the Virgin assist me, he appears a man of very good condition for a husband; but what maiden, unless she were cross-eyed or hunchbacked, could like a man with such a flat nose, with that skin the color of a ripe date, with those eyes like a dead calf's, and with those huge hands, which are more like the paws of a wild beast than the belongings of a person who with them should softly caress the woman whom Destiny bestows upon him for a companion? 'Tis said that he is no drunkard, nor cudgeler, nor dallier with women, nor a liar, and that he is besides possessed of much property and very rich. Pity 'tis that one who is so ugly and stiff-necked should unite such parts."

Thus turning the matter over and over in her mind, Maria together with Juan reached their home, where was awaiting them an esquire in a long mourning robe, who told Maria that the aunt of the Mayor of the city had died in an honest estate and in the flower of her age, for she had not yet completed her seventy years, and that the obsequies of this sexagenarian damsel were to be performed the following day, on which occasion her coffin would be carried to the church by maidens,

and he was come to ask Maria if she would please to be one of the bearers of the dead woman, for which she would receive a white robe, and to eat, and a ducat, and thanks into the bargain.

Maria, since she was a well-brought-up maid, replied that if it seemed well to her father it would also seem well to her.

Juan accepted, and Maria was rejoiced to be able to make a display of her hair, for it is well known that the maidens who bear another to the grave walk with disheveled locks. And when on the morrow the tiring women of the Mayoress arrayed Maria in a robe white as the driven snow and fine as the skin of an onion; and when they girt her slender waist with a sash of crimson silk, the ends of which hung down to the broad hem of the skirt; and when they crowned her smooth and white forehead with a wreath of white flowers, I warrant you that, what with the robe and the sash and the wreath, and the beautiful streaming hair and her lovely countenance and gracious mien, she seemed no female formed of flesh and blood, but a superhuman creature or blessed resident of those shining circles in which dwell the celestial hierarchies. The Mayor and the other mourners stepped forth to see her, and all unceasingly praised God, who was pleased to perform such miracles for the consolation and solace of those living in this world.

There in a corner of the hall, motionless like a heap of broken stones, stood one of the mutes with the hood of his long cloak covering his head, so that nothing could be seen but his eyes, the which he kept fixed on the fair damsel. The latter modestly lowered her eyes to the ground with her head a little bent and her cheeks red from bashfulness, although it pleased her no little to hear the praises of her beauty. At this moment a screen was pushed aside, and there began to appear a huge bulk of petticoats, which was nothing less than the person of the Mayoress, for she was with child and drawing near to her time. And when she saw Maria, she started, opened her eyes a hand's breadth wide, bit her lips, and called hurriedly for her husband. They stepped aside for a good while, and then hied them thence, and when they returned the mutes and maidens had all gone.

While they are burying the defunct lady I must tell you, curious readers, that the Mayor and Mayoress had been married for many years without having any children, and they longed for them like the countryman for rain in the month of May, and at last her hour of bliss came to the Mayoress, to the great content of her husband.

Now, it was whispered that the said lady had always been somewhat capricious; judge for yourselves what she would be now in the time of her pregnancy! And as she was already on the way to

fifty, she was more than mediocrely bald and hairless, and on these very same days had commissioned a woman barber, who lived in the odor of witchcraft, to prepare for her some false hair, but it was not to be that of a dead woman, for the Mayoress said very sensibly that if the hair belonged to a dead woman who rejoiced in supreme glory, or was suffering for her sins in purgatory, it would be profanation to wear any pledge of hers, and if she were in hell, it was a terrible thing to wear on one's person relics of one of the damned. And when the Mayoress saw the abundant locks of Maria, she coveted them for herself, and it was for this reason that she called to the Mayor to speak to her in private and besought him eagerly to persuade Maria to allow herself to be shorn upon the return from the burial.

"I warn you," said the Mayor," that you are desirous of entering upon a very knotty bargain, for the disheveled girl idolizes her hair in such wise that she would sooner lose a finger than suffer one of her tresses to be cut off."

"I warn you," replied the Mayoress, "that if on this very day the head of this young girl is not shorn smooth beneath my hand as a melon, the child to which I am about to give birth will have a head of hair on its face, and if it happens to be a female, look you, a pretty daughter is in store for you!"

"But bethink yourself that Maria will ask, who knows, a good few crowns for this shaving."

"Bethink yourself, that if not, your heir or heiress, begotten after so many years' marriage, will come amiss; and bear in mind, by the way, that we are not so young as to hope to replace this by another."

Upon this she turned her back to the Mayor, and went to her apartment crying out: "I want the hair, I must have the hair, and if I do not get the hair, by my halidom I shall never become a mother."

In the meantime the funeral had taken place without any novelty to mention, excepting that if in the streets any loose fellow in the crowd essayed to annoy the fair Maria, the hooded mute, of whom we made mention before, quickly drew from beneath his cloak a strap, with which he gave a lash to the insolent rogue without addressing one word to him, and then walked straight on as if nothing had happened. When all the mourners returned, the Mayor seized hold of Maria's hand and said to her:

"And now, fair maid, let us withdraw for a little while into this other apartment," and thus talking while in motion he brought her into his wife's private tiring-room, and sat himself down in a chair and bent his head and stroked his beard with the mien of one who is studying what beginning to

give to his speech. Maria, a little foolish and confused, remained standing in front of the Mayor, and she also humbly lowered before him her eyes, black as the sloe; and to occupy herself with something, gently fingered the ends of the sash which girded her waist and hung down over her skirt, not knowing what to expect from the grave mien and long silence of the Mayor, who, raising his eyes and looking up at Maria, when he beheld her in so modest a posture, devised thence a motive with which to begin, saying:

"Forsooth, Maria, so modest and pious is thy bearing, that it is easy to see thou art preparing thyself to become a black wimpled nun. And if it be so, as I presume it to be, I now offer of my own accord to dispose of thy entry into the cloisters without any dowry, on condition that thou dost give me something that thou hast on thy head, and which then will not be necessary for thee."

"Nay, beshrew me, Sir Mayor," replied Maria, "for I durst not think that the Lord calls upon me to take that step, for then my poor father would remain in the world without the staff of his old age."

"Then, now, I desire to give thee some wise counsel, maid Maria. Thou dost gain thy bread with great fatigue, thou shouldst make use of thy time as much as is possible. Now one of thy neighbors hath told me, that in the dressing of thy hair, thou doth waste every day more than an hour. It

would be better far if thou didst spend this hour on thy work rather than in the dressing and braiding which thou dost to thy hair."

"That is true, Sir Mayor," replied Maria, turning as red as a carnation, "but, look you, it is not my fault if I have a wealth of tresses, the combing and plaiting of which necessitates so long a time every morning."

"I tell thee it is thy fault," retorted the Mayor, "for if thou didst cut off this mane, thou would save thyself all this combing and plaiting, and thus would have more time for work, and so gain more money, and would also give no occasion to people to call thee vain. They even say that the Devil will some day carry thee off by thy hair. Nay, do not be distressed, for I already perceive the tears gathering in thy eyes, for thou hast them indeed very ready at hand; I admonish thee for thine own good without any self-interest. Cut thy hair off, shear thyself, shave thyself, good Maria, and to allay the bitterness of the shearing, I will give fifty maravedis, always on condition that thou dost hand me over the hair."

When Maria at first heard this offer of so small a sum for this her hair, it seemed to her a jest of the Mayor's, and she smiled right sweetly while she dried her tears, repeating:

"You will give me fifty maravedis if I shave myself?"

Now it appeared to the Mayor (who, it is said, was not gifted with all the prudence of Ulysses) that that smile signified that the maid was not satisfied with so small a price, and he added:

"If thou will not be content with fifty maravedis, I will give thee a hundred."

Then Maria saw some hangings of the apartment moving in front of her, and, perceiving a bulky protuberance, she immediately divined that the Mayoress was hiding behind there, and that the protuberance was caused by her portly form. She now discovered the Mayor's design, and that it was probably a caprice of his spouse, and she made a vow not to suffer herself to be shorn unless she acquired by these means the five hundred maravedis needful to pay the Arabian physician who would give her father back his eyesight.

Then the Mayor raised his price from a hundred maravedis to a hundred and fifty, and afterward to two hundred, and Maria continued her sweet smiling, shaking of the head and gestures, and every time that the Mayor bid higher and Maria feigned to be reluctant, she almost hoped that the Mayor would withdraw from his proposition, for the great grief it caused her to despoil herself of that precious ornament, notwithstanding that by means of it she might gain her father's health. Finally the Mayor, anxious to conclude the treaty, for he saw the stirring of the curtains,

and knew by them the anxiety and state of mind of the listener, closed by saying:

"Go to, hussy, I will give thee five hundred maravedis; see, once and for all, if thou canst agree to these terms."

"Be it so," replied Maria, sighing as if her soul would flee from her flesh with these words—"be it so, so long that nobody doth know that I remain bald."

"I will give my word for it," said the Mayoress, stepping from behind the curtains with a pair of sharp shears in her hands and a wrapper over her arm.

When Maria saw the scissors she turned as yellow as wax, and when they told her to sit down on the sacrificial chair, she felt herself grow faint and had to ask for a drink of water; and when they tied the wrapper round her throat it is related that she would have immediately torn it asunder if her courage had not failed her. And when at the first movement of the shears she felt the cold iron against her skull, I tell you it seemed to her as if they were piercing her heart with a bright dagger.

It is possible that she did not keep her head still for a moment while this tonsuring was taking place; she moved it in spite of herself, now to one side, now to another, to flee from the clipping scissors, of which the rude cuts and the creaking

axis wounded her ears. Her posture and movements, however, were of no avail to the poor shorn maiden, and the pertinacious shearer, with the anxiety and covetousness of a pregnant woman satisfying a caprice, seized the hair well, or ill, by handfuls, and went on bravely clipping, and the locks fell on to the white wrapper, slipping down thence till they reached the ground.

At last the business came to an end, and the Mayoress, who was beside herself with joy, caressingly passed the palm of her hand again and again over the maid's bald head from the front to the back, saying:

"By my mother's soul, I have shorn you so regularly and close to root, that the most skilful barber could not have shorn you better. Get up and braid the hair while my husband goes to get the money and I your clothes, so that you can leave the house without any one perceiving it."

The Mayor and Mayoress went out of the room, and Maria, as soon as she found herself alone, went to look at herself in a mirror that hung there; and when she saw herself bald she lost the patience she had had until then, and groaned with rage and struck herself, and even tried to wrench off her ears, which appeared to her now outrageously large, although they were not so in reality. She stamped upon her hair and cursed herself for having ever consented to lose it, without remembering

her father, and just as if she had no father at all. But as it is a quality of human nature to accept what can not be altered, poor angry Maria calmed down little by little, and she picked up the hair from the ground and bound it together and braided it into great ropes, not without kissing it and lamenting over it many times.

The Mayor and the Mayoress returned, he with the money and she with the every-day clothes of Maria, who undressed and folded her white robe in a kerchief, put on her old gown, hid herself with her shawl to the eyes, and walked, moaning, to the house of the Moor, without noticing that the man with the hood over his head was following behind her, and that when she, in a moment of forgetfulness, lowered her shawl through the habit she had of displaying her tresses, her bald head could be plainly seen.

The Moor received the five hundred maravedis with that good will with which money is always received, and told Maria to bring Juan Lanas to his house to stay there so long as there was any risk in the cure. Maria went to fetch the old man, and kept silence as to her shorn head so as not to grieve him, and while Juan remained the physician's guest, Maria dared not leave her home except after nightfall and then well enveloped; this, however, did not hinder her being followed by the muffled-up man.

One evening the Moor told her in secret that the next morning he would remove the bandages from Juan's eyes. Maria went to bed that night with great rejoicing, but thought to herself that when her father saw her (which would be with no little pleasure) he would be pleased three or four times more if he could see her with the pretty head-dress which she used to wear in her native town.

Amidst such caviling she donned the next day her best petticoat and ribands to hie to the Arabian's house; and while she was sitting down to shoe herself she of a sudden felt something like a hood closing over her head, and, turning round, she saw behind her the muffled-up man of before, who, throwing aside his cloak, discovered himself to be the sword-cutler, Master Palomo, who, without speaking, presented Maria with a little Venetian mirror, in which she looked and saw herself with her own hair and garb in such wise that she wondered for a good time if it were not a dream that the Mayoress had shorn her. The fact was, that Master Palomo was a friend of the old woman barber, and had seen in her house Maria's tresses on the very same afternoon of the morning in which he saw Maria was bald, and, keeping silence upon the matter, had wheedled the old woman into keeping Maria's hair for him, and dressing for the Mayoress some other hair of the same hue

which the crone had from a dead woman—a bargain by which the crafty old dame acquired many a bright crown.

The story relates that as soon as Maria regained her much-lamented and sighed-for hair by the hands of the gallant sword-cutler, the Master appeared to her much less ugly than before, and I do not know if it tells that from that moment she began to look on him with more favorable eyes, but in sooth it is a fact that upon his asking her to accept his escort to the Moor's house, she gave her assent, and the two set out hand in hand, the maiden holding her head up free from mufflers. As they both entered the physician's apartment her father threw himself into Maria's arms, crying:

"Glory to God, I see thee now, my beloved daughter. How tall and beautiful thou art grown! Verily, it is worth while to become blind for five years to see one's daughter matured thus! Now that I see daylight again, it is only right that I should no longer be a burden to thee. I shall work for myself, for as for thee it is already time for thee to marry."

"For this very purpose am I come," broke in at this opportune moment the silent sword-cutler; "I, as you will have already recognized by my voice, am your neighbor, Master Palomo. I love Maria, and ask you for her hand."

"Lackaday, Master, but your exterior is not

very prepossessing. Howbeit, if Maria doth accept you, I am content."

"I," replied Maria, wholly abashed, and smoothing the false hair (which then weighed upon her head and heart like a burden of five hundredweight)—"I, so may God enlighten me, for I dare not venture to reply."

Palomo took her right hand without saying anything, and as he did so Maria looked at the Master's wrists, and observed the wristbands of his shirt, neatly embroidered, and with some suspicion and beating of her heart said to him:

"If you wish to please me, good neighbor, tell me by what seamstress is this work."

"It is the work," replied the Master, jocularly—"the work of a pretty maiden who for five years has toiled for my person, albeit she hath not known it till now."

"Now I perceive," said Maria, "how that all the women who have come to give me linen to sew and embroider were sent by you, and that is why they paid me more than is customary."

The Master did not reply, but he smiled and held out his arms to Maria. Maria threw herself into them, embracing him very caressingly; and Juan himself said to the two:

"In good sooth, you are made one for the other."

"By my troth, my beloved one," continued the sword-cutler after a while, "if my countenance had

only been more pleasing, I should not have been silent toward you for so many long days, nor would I have been content with gazing at you from afar. I should have spoken to you, you would have made me the confidant of your troubles, and I would have given you the five hundred maravedis for the cure of your good father." And whispering softly into her ear, he added, "And then you would not have passed that evil moment under the hands of the Mayoress. But if you fear that she may break the promise she made to you to keep silence as to your cropped head, let us, if it please you, set out for Seville, where nobody knows you, and thus—"

"No more," exclaimed Maria, resolutely throwing on the ground the hair, which Juan picked up all astonished. "Send the hair to the Mayoress, since it was for this and not for that of the dead woman that she paid so dearly. For I, to cure myself of my vanity, now make a vow, with your good permission, to go shorn all my life; such artificial adornments are little befitting to the wives of honest burghers."

"But rely upon it," replied the Master-cutler, "that as soon as it is known that you have no hair, the girls of the city, envious of your beauty, will give you the nickname of *Mariquita the Bald!*"

"They may do so," replied Maria, "and that they may see that I do not care a fig for this or any other nickname, I swear to you that from this day

forth I will not suffer anybody to call me by another name than *Mariquita the Bald.*"

This was the event that rendered so famous throughout all Castile the beautiful daughter of good Juan Lanas, who in effect married Master Palomo, and became one of the most honorable and prolific women of the most illustrious city of Toledo.